

# NOTES ON THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

By C. H. M.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

**“AND Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, ‘Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep and do them.’”**

Let us carefully note these four words, so specially characteristic of the book of Deuteronomy, and so seasonable for the Lord’s people at all times and in all places: **“Hear,” “Learn,” “Keep,” “Do.”**

These are words of unspeakable preciousness to every truly pious soul – to everyone who honestly desires to walk in that narrow path of practical righteousness so pleasing to God, and so safe and so happy for us. The first of these words places the soul in the most blessed attitude in which anyone can be found, namely, that of hearing.

**-“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”**

**-“I will hear what God the Lord will speak.”**

**-“Hear, and your soul shall live.”**

The hearing ear lies at the very foundation of all true, practical Christian life. It places the soul in the only true and proper attitude for the creature. It is the real secret of all peace and blessedness.

It can scarcely be needful to remind the reader that when we speak of the soul in the attitude of hearing, it is assumed that what is heard is simply the Word of God. Israel had to hearken to **“the statutes and judgments”** of the Lord, and to nothing else. It was not to the commandments, traditions, and doctrines of men they were to give ear, but to the very words of the living God, who had redeemed and delivered them from the land of Egypt – the place of bondage, darkness, and death.

It is well to bear this in mind. It will preserve the soul from many a snare, many a difficulty. We hear a good deal, in certain quarters, about obedience, and about the moral fitness of surrendering our own will and submitting ourselves to authority. All this sounds very well, and has great weight with a large class of very religious and morally excellent people; but when men speak to us about obedience, we must ask the question, Obedience to what? when they speak to us about surrendering our own will, we must inquire of them, To whom are we to surrender it? when they speak to us about submitting to authority, we must insist upon their telling us the source or foundation of the authority.

This is of the deepest possible moment to every member of the household of faith. There are many very sincere and very earnest people who deem it very delightful to be saved the trouble of thinking for themselves, and to have their sphere of action and line of service laid out for them by wiser heads than their own. It seems a very restful and very pleasing thing to have each day's work laid out for us by some master-hand. It relieves the heart of a great load of responsibility, and it looks like humility and self-distrust to submit ourselves to some authority.

But we are bound, before God, to look well to the basis of the authority to which we surrender ourselves, else we may find ourselves in an utterly false position.

Take, for example, a monk, or a nun, or a member of a sisterhood. A monk obeys his abbot, a nun obeys her mother-abbess, "a sister" obeys her "lady-superior;" but the position and relationship of each is utterly false.

There is not a shadow of authority in the New Testament for monasteries, convents, or sisterhoods; on the contrary, the teaching of Holy Scripture, as well as the voice of nature, is utterly opposed to every one of them, inasmuch as they take men and women out of the place and out of the relationship in which God has set them, and in which they are designed and fitted to move, and form them into societies which are utterly destructive of natural affection, and subversive of all true Christian obedience.

We feel it right to call the attention of the Christian reader to this subject just now, seeing that the enemy is making a vigorous effort to revive the monastic system in our midst under various forms. Indeed some have had the temerity to tell us that monastic life is the only true form of Christianity. Surely, when such monstrous statements are made and listened to, it becomes us to look at the whole subject in the light of Scripture, and to call upon the advocates and adherents of monasticism to show us the foundations of the system in the Word of God.

Where, within the covers of the New Testament, is there anything, in the most remote degree, like a monastery, a convent, or a sisterhood? Where can we find an authority for any such office as that of an abbot, an abbess, or a lady-superior? There is absolutely no such thing, nor the shadow of it; and hence we have no hesitation in pronouncing the whole system, from foundation to top-stone, a fabric of superstition, alike opposed to the voice of nature and the voice of God: nor can we understand how anyone, in his sober senses, could presume to tell us that a monk or a nun is the only true exponent of Christian life. Yet there are those who thus speak, and there are those who listen to them, and that, too, in this day when the full, clear light of our glorious Christianity is shining upon us from the pages of the New Testament. \*

**\* We must accurately distinguish between "nature" and "flesh." The former is recognized in Scripture; the latter is condemned and set aside. "Doth not even nature itself teach you?" says the apostle (I Corinthians 11:14). Jesus beholding the young ruler in Mark 10, "loved him" although there was nothing but nature. To be without natural affection is one of the marks of the apostasy. Scripture teaches that we are dead to sin, not to nature, else what becomes of our natural relationships?**

But, blessed be God, we are called to obedience. We are called to “**hear**” – called to bow down, in holy and reverent submission, to authority. And here we join issue with infidelity and its lofty pretensions.

The path of the devout and lowly Christian is alike removed from superstition on the one hand and from infidelity on the other.

Peter’s noble reply to the council, in Acts 5, embodies, in its brief compass, a complete answer to both – “**We ought to obey God rather than men.**” We meet infidelity, in all its phases, in all its stages, and in its very deepest roots, with this one weighty sentence, “**We ought to obey;**” and we meet superstition, in every garb in which it clothes itself, with the all-important clause, “**We ought to obey God.**”

Here we have set forth, in the most simple form, the duty of every true Christian.

We are to obey God.

The infidel may smile contemptuously at a monk or a nun, and marvel how any rational being can so completely surrender his reason and his understanding to the authority of a fellow-mortal, or submit himself to rules and practices so absurd, so degrading, and so contrary to nature.

The infidel glories in his fancied intellectual freedom, and imagines that his own reason is quite a sufficient guide for him. He does not see that he is further from God than the poor monk or nun whom he so despises. He does not know that, while priding himself in his self-will, he is really led captive by Satan – the prince and god of this world.

Man is formed to obey – formed to look up to someone above him. The Christian is sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ, that is, to the very same character of obedience as that which was rendered by our adorable Lord and Saviour Himself.

This is of the deepest possible moment to everyone who really desires to know what true Christian obedience is.

To understand this is the real secret of deliverance from the self-will of the infidel and the false obedience of superstition. It can never be right to do our own will: it may be quite wrong to do the will of our fellow: it must always be right to do the will of God. This was what Jesus came to do, and what He always did

- “**Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.**”

- “**I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.**”

Now, we are called and set apart to this blessed character of obedience, as we learn from the inspired apostle Peter, in the opening of his first Epistle, where he speaks of believers as “**elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.**”

This is an immense privilege, and at the same time a most holy and solemn responsibility.

We must never forget for a moment that God has elected us, and the Holy Spirit has set us apart, not only to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, but also to His obedience. Such is the obvious meaning and moral force of the words just quoted – words of unspeakable preciousness to every lover of holiness – words which effectually deliver us from self-will, from legality, and from superstition. Blessed deliverance!

But it may be that the pious reader feels disposed to call our attention to the exhortation in Hebrews 13 – **“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.”**

A deeply important word, most surely, with which we should also connect a passage in I Thessalonians – **“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sakes”** (Chap. 5:12, 13).

And again, in I Corinthians 16:15, 16 – **“I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry [or service] of the saints,) that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to everyone that helpeth with us and laboureth.”**

To all these we must add another very lovely passage from the first Epistle of Peter – **“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away”** (Chap. 5:1-4).

We may be asked; Do not the above passages set forth the principle of obedience to certain men? and if so, why object to human authority?

The answer is very simple. Wherever Christ imparts a spiritual gift, whether it be the gift of teaching, the gift of rule, or the gift of pastorship, it is the bounden duty and privilege of Christians to recognize and appreciate such gifts. Not to do so would be to forsake our own mercies. But then we must bear in mind that in all such cases the gift must be a reality – a plain, palpable, bona-fide, divinely given thing.

It is not a man assuming a certain office or position, or being appointed by his fellow to any so-called ministry. All this is perfectly worthless, and worse than worthless; it is a daring intrusion upon a sacred domain which must, sooner or later, bring down the judgment of God.

All true ministry is of God, and based upon the possession of a positive gift from the Head of the Church; so that we may truly say, No gift, no ministry.

In all the passages quoted above, we see positive gift possessed, and actual work done. Moreover, we see a true heart for the lambs and sheep of the flock of Christ; we see divine grace and power. The word in Hebrews 13 is, “**Obey them that have the rule over you** [ἡγουμενοις].”

Now, it is essential to a true guide that he should go before you in the way. It would be the height of folly for anyone to assume the title of guide if he were ignorant of the way, and neither able nor willing to go in it. Who would think of obeying such?

So also when the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians to “**know**” and “**esteem**” certain persons, on what does he found his exhortation? Is it upon the mere assumption of a title, an office, or a position?

Nothing of the kind. He grounds his appeal upon the actual, well-known fact that these persons were disrespectful and that they admonished them. And why were they to “**esteem them very highly in love**”? Was it for their office or their title? No; but “**for their work’s sake.**”

And why were the Corinthians exhorted to submit themselves to the household of Stephanas? Was it because of an empty title or assumed office? By no means; but because “**they addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.**” They were actually in the work. They had received gift and grace from Christ, and they had a heart for His people. They were not boasting of their office or insisting upon their title, but giving themselves devotedly to the service of Christ, in the persons of His dear people.

Now this is the true principle of ministry. It is not human authority at all, but divine gift and spiritual power communicated by Christ to His servants, exercised by them, in responsibility to Him, and thankfully recognized by His saints.

A man may set up to be a teacher or a pastor, or he may be appointed by his fellows to the office or title of a pastor; but unless he possesses a positive gift from the Head of the Church, it is all the merest sham, a hollow assumption, an empty conceit; and his voice will be the voice of a stranger, which the true sheep of Christ do not know and ought not to recognize. \*

**\* The reader will do well to ponder the fact that there is no such thing in the New Testament as human appointment to preach the Gospel, teach in the assembly of God, or feed the flock of Christ. Elders and deacons were ordained by the apostles or their delegates, Timothy and Titus; but evangelists, pastors, and teachers were never so ordained. We must distinguish between gift and local charge. Elders and deacons might possess a special gift or not; it had nothing to do with their local charge. If the reader would understand the subject of ministry, let him study I Corinthians 12-14. and Ephesians 4:8-13. In the former we have, first, the basis of all true ministry in the Church of God, namely, divine appointment – “God hath set the members,” etc.; secondly, the motive – spring – “love;” thirdly, the object – “for the edifying of the body.” In Ephesians 4, we have the source of all ministry – a risen and ascended Lord; the design – “to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry;” the duration – “till we all come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”**

**In a word, ministry, in all its departments, is entirely a divine institution. It is not of man or by man, but of God. The Master must, in every case, fit, fill, and appoint the vessel. There is no authority in Scripture for the notion that every man has a right to minister in the Church of God. Liberty for men is radicalism and not Scripture. Liberty for the Holy Ghost to minister by whom He will is what we are taught in the New Testament. May we learn it.**

But, on the other hand, where there is the divinely gifted teacher, the true, loving, wise, faithful, laborious pastor, watching for souls, weeping over them, waiting upon them, like a gentle, tender nurse, able to say to them, **“Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord”** – where these things are found, there will not be much difficulty in recognizing and appreciating them.

How do we know a good dentist? Is it by seeing his name on a brass plate? No; but by his work. A man may call himself a dentist ten thousand times over, but if he be only an unskillful operator, who would think of employing him?

Thus it is in all human affairs, and thus it is in the matter of ministry. If a man has a gift, he is a minister; if he has not, all the appointment, authority, and ordination in the world could not make him a minister of Christ. It may make him a minister of religion; but a minister of religion and a minister of Christ – a minister in Christendom and a minister in the Church of God, are two totally different things.

All true ministry has its Source in God; it rests on divine authority, and its object is to bring the soul into His presence, and link it on to Him.

False ministry, on the contrary, has its source in man; it rests on human authority, and its object is to link the soul on to itself.

This marks the immense difference between the two. The former leads to God; the latter leads away from Him: that feeds, nourishes, and strengthens the new life; this hinders its progress, in every way, and plunges it in doubt and darkness. In a word, we may say, true ministry is of God, through Him, and to Him: false ministry is of man, through him, and to him. The former we prize more than we can say; the latter we reject with all the energy of our moral being.

We trust sufficient has been said to satisfy the mind of the reader in reference to the matter of obedience to those whom the Lord may see fit to call to the work of the ministry.

We are bound, in every case, to judge by the Word of God, and to be assured that it is a divine reality and not a human sham – a positive gift from the Head of the Church, and not an empty title conferred by men. In all cases where there is real gift and grace, it is a sweet privilege to obey and submit ourselves, inasmuch as we discern Christ in the person and ministry of His beloved servants.

There is no difficulty, to a spiritual mind, in owning real grace and power.

We can easily tell whether a man is seeking, in true love, to feed our souls with the bread of life, and lead us on in the ways of God, or whether he is seeking to exalt himself, and promote his own interests. Those who are living near the Lord can readily discern between true power and hollow assumption. Moreover, we never find Christ's true ministers parading their authority, or vaunting themselves of their office; they do the work and leave it to speak for itself.

In the case of the blessed apostle Paul, we find him referring again and again to the plain proofs of his ministry – the unquestionable evidence afforded in the conversion and blessing of souls. He could say to the poor misguided Corinthians, when, under the influence of some self-exalting pretender, they foolishly called in question his apostleship, **“Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me . . . examine yourselves.”**

This was close, pointed dealing with them. They themselves were the living proofs of his ministry.

If his ministry was not of God, what and when, were they? But it was of God, and this was his joy, his comfort, and his strength. He was **“an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.”**

He gloried in the source of his ministry; and as to its character, he had but to appeal to a body of evidence quite sufficient to carry conviction to any right mind. In his case, it could be truly said, it was not the speech, but the power.

Thus it must be, in measure, in every case. We must look for the power: we must have reality.

Mere titles are nothing. Men may undertake to confer titles and appoint to offices, but they have no more authority to do so than they have to appoint admirals in her majesty's fleet or generals in her army. If we were to see a man assuming the style and title of an admiral or a general, without her majesty's commission, we should pronounce him an idiot or a lunatic. This is but a feeble illustration to set forth the folly of men taking upon them the title of ministers of Christ without one atom of spiritual gift or divine authority.

Shall we be told, we must not judge? We are bound to judge.

**“Beware of false prophets.”** How can we beware if we are not to judge? But how are we to judge? **“By their fruits ye shall know them.”**

Can the Lord's people not tell the difference between a man who comes to them in the power of the Spirit, gifted by the Head of the Church, full of love to their souls, earnestly desiring their true blessing, seeking not theirs but them – a holy, gracious, humble, self-emptying servant of Christ; and a man who comes with a self-assumed or a humanly conferred title, without a single trace of anything divine or heavenly either in his ministry or in his life? Of course they can; no one in his senses would think of calling in question a fact so obvious. But further, we may ask, What mean those words of the venerable apostle John – **“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world”**?

How are we to try the spirits, or how are we to discern between the true and the false, if we are not to judge?

Again, the same apostle, writing to “**the elect lady,**” gives her the following most solemn admonition: “**If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.**”

Was she not responsible to act on this admonition? Assuredly. But how could she if we are not to judge? And what had she to judge? Was it as to whether those who came to her house were ordained, authorized, or licensed by any man or body of men? Nothing of the kind. The one great and all-important question for her was as to the doctrine.

If they brought the true, the divine doctrine of Christ – the doctrine of Jesus Christ come in the flesh, she was to receive them; if not, she was to shut her door, with a firm hand, against them, no matter who they were or where they came from.

If they had all the credentials that man could bestow upon them, yet if they brought not the truth, she was to reject them with stern decision.

This might seem very harsh, very narrow-minded, very bigoted; but with this she had nothing whatever to do. She had just to be as broad and as narrow as the truth. Her door and her heart were to be wide enough to admit all who brought Christ, and no wider. Was she to pay compliments at the expense of her Lord? was she to seek a name for largeness of heart or breadth of mind by receiving to her house and to her table the teachers of a false Christ? The very thought is absolutely horrible.

But finally, in the second chapter of Revelation, we find the church at Ephesus commended for having tried those who said they were apostles and were not. How could this be if we are not to judge?

Is it not most evident to the reader that an utterly false use is made of our Lord’s words in Matthew 7:1 – “**Judge not, that ye be not judged,**” and also of the apostle’s words in I Corinthians 4:5 – “**Therefore judge nothing before the time**”?

It is impossible that Scripture can contradict itself; and hence, whatever be the true meaning of our Lord’s “**Judge not,**” or the apostle’s “**Judge nothing,**” it is perfectly certain that they do not, in the most remote way, interfere with the solemn responsibility of all Christians to judge the gift, the doctrine, and the life of all who take the place of preachers, teachers, and pastors in the Church of God.

And then, if we be asked as to the meaning of “**Judge not**” and “**Judge nothing,**” we believe the words simply forbid our judging motives, or hidden springs of action. With these we have nothing whatever to do.

We cannot penetrate below the surface, and, thanks be to God, we are not asked to do so – yea, we are positively forbidden. We cannot read the counsels of the heart; it is the province and prerogative of God alone to do this: but to say that we are not to judge the doctrine, the gift, or the manner of life of those who take the place of preachers, teachers, and pastors in the Church of God, is simply to fly in the face of Holy Scripture, and to ignore the very instincts of the divine nature implanted in us by the Holy Ghost.

Hence, therefore, we can return, with increased clearness and decision, to our thesis of Christian obedience.

It seems perfectly plain that the fullest recognition of all true ministry in the Church, and the most gracious submission of ourselves to all those whom our Lord Christ may see fit to raise up as pastors, teachers, and guides in our midst, can never, in the smallest degree, interfere with the grand fundamental principle set forth in Peter's magnificent reply to the council – **"We ought to obey God rather than men."**

It will ever be the aim and object of all true ministers of Christ to lead those to whom they minister in the true path of obedience to the Word of God.

The chapter which lies open before us, as indeed the entire book of Deuteronomy, shows us very plainly how Moses, that eminent servant of God, ever sought and diligently labored to press upon the congregation of Israel the urgent necessity of the most implicit obedience to all the statutes and judgments of God.

He did not seek any place of authority for himself: he never lorded it over God's heritage. His one grand theme, from first to last, was obedience. This was the burden of all his discourses – obedience, not to him, but to his and their Lord. He rightly judged that this was the true secret of their happiness, their moral security, their dignity, and their strength. He knew that an obedient people must also, of necessity, be an invincible and invulnerable people.

No weapon formed against them could prosper so long as they were governed by the Word of God.

In a word, he knew and believed that Israel's province was to obey the Lord, as it was the Lord's province to bless Israel.

It was their one simple business to **"hear," "learn," "keep,"** and **"do"** the revealed will of God; and so doing, they might count on Him, with all possible confidence, to be their shield, their strength, their safeguard, their refuge, their resource, their all in all.

The only true and proper path for the Israel of God is that narrow path of obedience on which the light of God's approving countenance ever shines, and all who, through grace, tread that path will find Him

"A guide, a glory, a defense,  
To save from every fear."

This, surely, is quite enough. We have nothing to do with consequences: these we may, in simple confidence, leave to Him whose we are and whom we are responsible to serve.

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.”**

If we are doing His will, we shall ever find His name a strong tower; but, on the other hand, if we are not walking in a path of practical righteousness – if we are doing our own will – if we are living in the habitual neglect of the plain Word of God, then, verily, it is utterly vain for us to think that the name of the Lord will be a strong tower to us; rather would His name be a reproof to us, leading us to judge our ways and to return to the path of righteousness from which we have wandered.

Blessed be His name, His grace will ever meet us, in all its precious fullness and freeness, in the place of self-judgment and confession, however we may have failed and wandered; but this is a totally different thing.

We may have to say, with the Psalmist, **“Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.”**

But then, a soul crying to God from the depths, and getting forgiveness, is one thing; and a soul looking to Him in the path of practical righteousness is quite another. We must carefully distinguish between these two things. Confessing our sins and finding pardon must never be confounded with walking uprightly and counting on God. Both are blessedly true, but they are not the same thing.

We shall now proceed with our chapter.

The Christian not **“under law”**

At the second verse, Moses reminds the people of their covenant-relationship with the Lord. He says, **“The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The Lord talked with you face to face, in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, (I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to show you the word of the Lord; for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up into the mount) saying,”** etc.

**The reader must distinguish and thoroughly understand the difference between the covenant made at Horeb and the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are essentially different. The former was a covenant of works, in which the people undertook to do all that the Lord had spoken: the latter was a covenant of pure grace, in which God pledged Himself with an oath to do all which He promised.**

Human language would utterly fail us to set forth the immense difference, in every respect,

between these two covenants.

In their basis, in their character, in their accompaniments, and in their practical result, they are as different as any two things could possibly be. The Horeb covenant rested upon human competency for the fulfillment of its terms, and this one fact is quite sufficient to account for the total failure of the whole thing. The Abrahamic covenant rested upon divine competency for the fulfillment of its terms, and hence the utter impossibility of its failure in a single jot or tittle.

Having in our *“Notes on the Book of Exodus”* gone somewhat fully into the subject of the law, and endeavored to set forth the divine object in giving it, and, further, the utter impossibility of anyone getting life or righteousness by keeping it, we must refer the reader to what we have there advanced on this profoundly interesting subject.

It seems strange, to one taught exclusively by Scripture, that such confusion of thought should prevail amongst professing Christians in reference to a question so distinctly and definitively settled by the Holy Ghost. Were it merely a question of the divine authority of Exodus 20, or Deuteronomy 5, as inspired portions of the Bible, we should not have a word to say. We most fully believe that these chapters are as much inspired as the seventeenth of John or the eighth of Romans.

But this is not the point. All true Christians receive, with devout thankfulness, the precious statement that **“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God;”** and, further, they rejoice in the assurance that **“whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope;”** and, finally, they believe that the morality of the law is of abiding and universal application.

Murder, adultery, theft, false witness, covetousness, are wrong – always wrong – everywhere wrong: to honor our parents is right – always and everywhere right.

We read, in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, **“Let him that stole steal no more;”** and again, in chapter 6, we read, **“Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”**

All this is so divinely plain and settled that discussion is definitively closed; but when we come to look at the law as a ground of relationship with God, we get into an entirely different region of thought. Scripture, in manifold places, and in the clearest possible manner, teaches us that, as Christians, as children of God, we are not on that ground at all.

The Jew was on that ground, but he could not stand there with God. It was death and condemnation. **“They could not endure that which was commanded, ‘And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart;’ and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, ‘I exceedingly fear and quake.’”**

The Jew found the law to be a bed on which he could not stretch himself, and a covering in which he could not wrap himself.

As to the Gentile, he was never, by any one branch of the divine economy, placed under law. His condition is expressly declared, in the opening of the Epistle to the Romans, to be “**without law** [*ανομως*].” – “**For when the Gentiles, which have not the law,**” etc., and, “**As many as have sinned without law shall perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.**”

Here the two classes are brought into sharp and vivid contrast, in the matter of their dispensational position.

The Jew, under law; the Gentile, without law,- nothing can be more distinct. The Gentile was placed under government, in the person of Noah; but never under law. Should anyone feel disposed to call this in question, let him produce a single line of Scripture to prove that God ever placed the Gentiles under the law. Let him search and see.

It is of no possible use to argue and reason and object,- it is utterly vain to say, “We think” this or that: the question is, “**What saith the Scripture?**”

If it says that the Gentiles were put under the law, let the passage be produced. We solemnly declare it says nothing of the kind, but the very reverse. It describes the condition and the position of the Gentile as “**without law**”- “**having not the law.**”

In Acts 10, we see God opening the kingdom of Heaven to the Gentile; in Acts 15:27, we see Him opening “**the door of faith**” to the Gentile; in Acts 28:28, we see Him sending His salvation to the Gentile: but we search in vain, from cover to cover of the blessed Book, for a passage in which He places the Gentile under the law.

We would very earnestly entreat the Christian reader to give this deeply interesting and important question his calm attention. Let him lay aside all his preconceived thoughts, and examine the matter simply in the light of Holy Scripture. We are quite aware that our statements on this subject will be regarded by thousands as novel, if not actually heretical; but this does not move us, in the smallest degree.

It is our one grand desire to be taught absolutely and exclusively by Scripture. The opinions, commandments, and doctrines of men have no weight whatever with us. The dogmas of the various schools of divinity must just go for what they are worth. We demand Scripture.

A single line of inspiration is amply sufficient to settle this question, and close all discussion, forever.

Let us be shown from the Word of God that the Gentiles were ever put under the law, and we shall at once bow; but inasmuch as we cannot find it there, we reject the notion altogether, and we would have the reader to do the same.

The invariable language of Scripture, in describing the position of the Jew, is, “**under law;**” and, in describing the position of the Gentile, is, “**without law.**” This is so obvious that we cannot but marvel how any reader of the Bible can fail to see it. \*

**\* The reader may perhaps feel disposed to inquire, On what ground will the Gentile be judged if he is not under the law? Romans 1:20 teaches us distinctly that the testimony of creation leaves him without excuse. Then, in chapter 2:15, he is taken up on the ground of conscience – “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness,” etc. Finally, as regards those nations that have become professedly Christian, they will be judged on the ground at their profession.**

If the reader will turn, for a few moments, to the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, he will see how the first attempt to put Gentile converts under the law was met by the apostles and the whole church at Jerusalem. The question was raised at Antioch; and God, in His infinite goodness and wisdom, so ordered that it should not be settled there, but that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem and have the matter fully and freely discussed, and definitively settled by the unanimous voice of the twelve apostles and the whole church. How we can bless our God for this!

We can at once see that the decision of a local assembly, such as Antioch, even though approved by Paul and Barnabas, would not carry the same weight as that of the twelve apostles assembled in council at Jerusalem. But the Lord, blessed be His name, took care that the enemy should be completely confounded, and that the law-teachers of that day, and of every other day, should be distinctly and authoritatively taught that it was not according to His mind that Christians should be put under law, for any object whatsoever. The subject is so deeply important that we cannot forbear quoting a few passages for the reader. We believe it will refresh both the reader and the writer to refer to the soul-stirring addresses delivered at the most remarkable and interesting council that ever sat.

**“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, ‘Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.’”**

How awful! How terribly chilling! What a death-knell to ring in the ears of those who had been converted under Paul’s splendid address in the synagogue at Antioch!

**“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man” – without circumcision or works of law of any kind whatsoever – “is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe” – irrespective altogether of circumcision – “are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses . . . And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.”**

Such was the glorious message sent to the Gentiles by the lips of the apostle Paul – a message of free, full, immediate, and perfect salvation – full remission of sins and perfect justification, through faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ. But according to the teaching of the **“certain men which came down from Judaea,”** all this was insufficient – Christ was not enough, without circumcision and the Law of Moses.

Poor Gentiles, who had never heard of circumcision or the law of Moses, must add to Christ and His glorious salvation the keeping of the whole law.

How must Paul's heart have burned within him to have the beloved Gentile converts brought under such monstrous teaching as this! He saw in it nothing short of the complete surrender of Christianity. If circumcision must be added to the Cross of Christ – if the law of Moses must supplement the grace of God, then verily all was gone.

But, blessed forever be the God of all grace, He caused a noble stand to be made against such deadly teaching. When the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord raised up a standard against him.

**“When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring,”** not the circumcision, but **“the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.”**

The brethren were in the current of the mind of Christ, and in sweet communion with the heart of God; and hence they rejoiced to hear of the conversion and salvation of the Gentiles. We may rest assured it would have afforded them no joy to hear of the heavy yoke of circumcision and the Law of Moses being put upon the necks of those beloved disciples who had just been brought into the glorious liberty of the Gospel. But to hear of their conversion to God, their salvation by Christ, their being sealed by the Holy Ghost, filled their hearts with a joy which was in lovely harmony with the mind of Heaven.

**“And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”**

Who made it **“needful”**? Not God, surely; inasmuch as He had, in His infinite grace, opened the door of faith to them without circumcision or any command to keep the law of Moses. No; it was **“certain men”** who presumed to speak of such things as needful – men who have troubled the Church of God from that day to the present – men **“desiring to be teachers of the law, knowing neither what they say nor whereof they affirm.”**

Law-teachers never know what is involved in their dark and dismal teaching. They have not the most distant idea of how thoroughly hateful their teaching is to the God of all grace, the Father of mercies.

But, thanks be to God, the chapter from which we are now quoting affords the very clearest and most forcible evidence that could be given as to the divine mind on the subject. It proves, beyond all question, that it was not of God to put Gentile believers under the law.

**“And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing”** (alas! how soon it began!) **“Peter rose up and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear,”** not the law of Moses or circumcision, but **“the word of the Gospel, and believe. And God which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as unto us. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”**

Mark this, reader. The law had proved an intolerable yoke to those who were under it, that is, the Jews; and, further, it was nothing short of tempting God to put that yoke upon the neck of Gentile Christians. Would that all the law-teachers throughout the length and breadth of Christendom would but open their eyes to this grand fact! and not only so, but that all the Lord's beloved people everywhere were given to see that it is in positive opposition to the will of God that they should be put under the law for any object whatsoever.

**“But,”** adds the blessed apostle of the circumcision, **“we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,”** and not by law in any shape or form, **“we shall be saved even as they.”**

This is uncommonly fine, coming from the lips of the apostle of the circumcision. He does not say, they shall be saved even as we; but, **“We shall be saved even as they.”**

The Jew is well content to come down from his lofty dispensational position, and be saved after the pattern of the poor uncircumcised Gentile. Surely, those noble utterances must have fallen in stunning force upon the ears of the law-party. They left them, as we say, not a leg to stand upon.

**“Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”** The inspiring Spirit has not thought good to tell us what Paul and Barnabas said on this memorable occasion, and we can see His wisdom in this. It is evidently His object to give prominence to Peter and James, as men whose words would, of necessity, have more weight with the law-teachers than those of the apostle to the Gentiles and his companion.

**“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles,”** not to convert them all, but **“to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets;”** (here he brings an overwhelming tide of evidence from the Old Testament to bear down upon the Judaizers,) **“as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles,”** without the slightest reference to circumcision or the law of Moses, but **“upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.”**

Here, then, we have this great question definitively settled by the Holy Ghost, the twelve apostles, and the whole Church; and we cannot but be struck with the fact that, at this most important council, none spoke more emphatically, more distinctly, or more decidedly than Peter and James; the former, the apostle of the circumcision, and the latter, the one who specially addressed the twelve tribes, and whose position and ministry were calculated to give great weight to his words, in the judgment of all who were still, in any measure, occupying Jewish or legal ground.

Both these eminent apostles were clear and decided in their judgment that the Gentile converts were not to be **“troubled”** or burdened with the law. They proved, in their powerful addresses, that to place the Gentile Christians under the law was directly contrary to the Word, the will, and the ways of God.

Who can fail to see the marvelous wisdom of God in this? The words of Paul and Barnabas are not recorded. We are simply told that they rehearsed what things God had wrought among the Gentiles. That they should be utterly opposed to putting the Gentiles under the law was only what might be expected; but to find Peter and James so decided would carry great weight with all parties.

But if the reader would have a clear view of Paul’s thoughts on the question of the law, he should study the Epistle to the Galatians.

There this blessed apostle, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost, pours out his heart to the Gentile converts in words of glowing earnestness and commanding power. It is perfectly amazing how anyone can read this wonderful Epistle and yet maintain that Christians are under the law, in any way or for any purpose.

Hardly has the apostle got through his brief opening address when he plunges, with his characteristic energy, into the subject with which his large, loving, though grieved and troubled heart is full to overflowing.

**“I marvel,”** he says – and well he might – **“that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into”** -what? The law of Moses? Nay, but **“the grace of Christ into another Gospel which is not another** [*ετερον ευαγγελιον ο ουχ εστιν αλλο*]; **but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”**

Let all law-teachers ponder these burning words.

Do they seem strong and severe? Let us remember that they are the very words of God the Holy Ghost. Yes, reader, God the Holy Ghost hurls His awful anathema at anyone who presumes to add the law of Moses to the Gospel of Christ – anyone who attempts to place Christians under the law. How is it that men are not afraid, in the face of such words, to contend for the law? Are they not afraid of coming under the solemn curse of God the Holy Ghost?

Some, however, seek to meet this question by telling us that they do not take the law for justification, but as a rule of life; but this is neither reasonable nor intelligent, inasmuch as we may very lawfully inquire, Who gave us authority to decide as to the use we are to make of the law? We are either under the law or we are not. If we are under it at all, it is not a question of how we take it, but how it takes us.

This makes all the difference. The law knows no such distinctions as those which some theologians contend for. If we are under it for any object whatsoever, we are under the curse; for it is written, **“Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”**

To say that I am born again, I am a Christian, will not meet the case at all; for what has the law to do with the question of new birth, or of Christianity? Nothing whatever. The law is addressed to man, as a responsible being. It demands perfect obedience, and pronounces its curse upon everyone who fails to render it.

Moreover, it will not do to say that though we have failed to keep the law, yet Christ has fulfilled it in our room and stead. The law knows nothing of obedience by proxy. Its language is, **“The man that doeth them shall live in them.”**

Nor is it merely on the man who fails to keep the law that the curse is pronounced, but, as if to put the principle in the clearest possible light before us, we read that **“as many as are of the works of law are under the curse”** (See Greek). That is, as many as take their stand on legal ground – as many as are on that principle – in a word, as many as have to do with works of law, are, of necessity, under the curse. Hence we may see at a glance the terrible inconsistency of a Christian’s maintaining the idea of being under the law as a rule of life and yet not being under the curse.

It is simply flying in the face of the very plainest statements of Holy Scripture. Blessed be the God of all grace, the Christian is not under the curse. But why? Is it because the law has lost its power, its majesty, its dignity, its holy stringency?

By no means. To say so were to blaspheme the law. To say that any “man,” call him what you please – Christian, Jew, or heathen – can be under the law, can stand on that ground, and yet not be under the curse, is to say that he perfectly fulfills the law or that the law is abrogated – it is to make it null and void. Who will dare to say this? Woe be to all who do so.

But how comes it to pass that the Christian is not under the curse? Because he is not under the law.

And how has he passed from under the law? Is it by another having fulfilled it in his stead? Nay; we repeat the statement, there is no such idea throughout the entire legal economy as obedience by proxy. How is it, then? Here it is, in all its moral force, fullness, and beauty: **“I through the law am dead to law, that I might live unto God.” \***

\* The omission of the article adds immensely to the force, fullness, and clearness of the passage. It is *δια νομου νομω απεθανον*. A wonderful clause, surely. Would that it were better understood! It demolishes a vast mass of human theology. It leaves the law in its own proper sphere; but takes the believer completely from under its power, and out of its range, by death. “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (which we never could do if under the law). “For when we were in the flesh” – a correlative term with being under the law – “the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” Mark the melancholy combination – “under the law” – “in the flesh” – “motions of sins” – “fruit unto death”! Can anything be more strongly marked? But there is another side, thank God, to this question – His own bright and blessed side. Here it is: “But now we are delivered from the law.” How? Is it by another’s having fulfilled it for us? Nay; but, “Having died to that [*απεθανοντες εν ω*] wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” How perfect and how lovely is the harmony of Romans 7 and Galatians 2! “I through the law am dead to law, that I might live unto God.”

Now, if it be true, and the apostle says it is, that we are dead to law, how can the law, by any possibility, be a rule of life to us? It proved only a rule of death, curse, and condemnation to those who were under it – those who had received it by the disposition of angels. Can it prove to be aught else to us? Did the law ever produce a single cluster of living fruit, or of the fruits of righteousness, in the history of any son or daughter of Adam? Hear the apostle’s reply – “**When we were in the flesh,**” that is, when we were viewed as men in our fallen nature, “**the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.**”

It is very important for the reader to understand the real force of the expression, “**in the flesh.**” It does not, in this passage, mean “**in the body.**” It simply sets forth the condition of unconverted men and women responsible to keep the law. Now, in this condition, all that was or ever could be produced was “**fruit unto death**” – “**motions of sins.**” No life, no righteousness, no holiness, nothing for God, nothing right at all. \*

\* It is needful to bear in mind that although the Gentile was never, by the dispensational dealings of God, put under the law, yet, in point of fact, all baptized professors take that ground. Hence there is a vast difference between Christendom and the heathen in reference to the question of the law. Thousands of unconverted people, every week, ask God to incline their hearts to keep the law. Surely, such persons stand on very different ground from the heathen who never heard of the law, and never heard of the Bible.

But where are we now, as Christians? Hear the reply – “**I through the law am dead to law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh**” (here it means in the body) “**I live**” – how? By the law, as a rule of life?

Not a hint at such a thing, but “**by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.**”

This, and nothing else, is Christianity. Do we understand it? do we enter into it? are we in the power of it? There are two distinct evils from which we are completely delivered by the precious death of Christ, namely, legality on the one hand and licentiousness on the other. Instead of those terrible evils, it introduces us into the holy liberty of grace

- Liberty to serve God
- Liberty to **“mortify our members which are upon the earth”**
- Liberty to deny **“ungodliness and worldly lusts”**
- Liberty to **“live soberly, righteously, and godly”**
- Liberty to **“keep under the body and bring it into subjection.”**

Yes, beloved Christian reader, let us remember this; let us deeply ponder the words, **“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”**

The old **“I”** dead – crucified, buried: the new **“I”** alive in Christ.

Let us not mistake this. We know of nothing more awful, nothing more dangerous, than for the old **“I”** to assume the new ground; or, in other words, the glorious doctrines of Christianity taken up in the flesh – unconverted people talking of being free from the law, and turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.

We must confess we would rather, a thousand times, have legality than licentiousness. It is this latter that many of us have to watch against with all possible earnestness. It is growing around us with appalling rapidity, and paving the way for that dark and desolating tide of infidelity which shall, ere long, roll over the length and breadth of Christendom.

To talk of being free from the law in any way save by being dead to it, and alive to God, is not Christianity at all, but licentiousness, from which every pious soul must shrink with holy horror. If we are dead to the law, we are dead to sin also; and hence we are not to do our own will, which is only another name for sin; but the will of God, which is true practical holiness.

Further, let us ever bear in mind that if we are dead to the law, we are dead to this present evil world also, and linked with a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ. Hence, we are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world.

To contend for position in the world is to deny that we are dead to the law; for we cannot be alive to the one and dead to the other. The death of Christ has delivered us from the law, from the power of sin, from this present evil world, and from the fear of death. But then all these things hang together, and we cannot be delivered from one without being delivered from all.

To assert our freedom from the law, while pursuing a course of carnality, self-indulgence, and worldliness, is one of the darkest and deadliest evils of the last days.

The Christian is called to prove, in his daily life, that grace can produce results that law could never reach.

It is one of the moral glories of Christianity to enable a man to surrender self and live for others. Law never could do this. It occupied a man with himself. Under its rule, every man had to do the best he could for himself. If he tried to love his neighbor, it was to work out a righteousness for himself. Under grace, all is blessedly and gloriously reversed – self is set aside as a thing crucified, dead, and buried; the old “I” is gone, and the new “I” is before God in all the acceptability and preciousness of Christ; He is our life, our righteousness, our holiness, our object, our model, our all; He is in us and we are in Him, and our daily practical life is to be simply Christ reproduced in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. Hence, we are not only called to love our neighbor, but our enemy; and this, not to work out a righteousness, for we have become the righteousness of God in Christ: it is simply the outflow of the life which we possess – which is in us, and this life is Christ.

A Christian is a man who should live Christ. He is neither a Jew “**under law**” nor a Gentile “**without law**,” but “**a man in Christ**,” standing in grace, called to the same character of obedience as that which was rendered by the Lord Jesus Himself.

We shall not pursue this subject further here, but we earnestly entreat the Christian reader to study attentively the fifteenth chapter of Acts and the Epistle to the Galatians. Let him drink in the blessed teaching of these scriptures, and we feel assured he will arrive at a clear understanding of the great question of the law. He will see that the Christian is not under the law for any purpose whatsoever; that his life, his righteousness, his holiness, are on a different ground or principle altogether; that to place the Christian under law in any way is to deny the very foundations of Christianity and contradict the plainest statements of the Word. He will learn, from the third chapter of Galatians, that to put ourselves under the law is to give up Christ, to give up the Holy Ghost, to give up faith, to give up the promises.

Tremendous consequences! But there they are, plainly set forth before our eyes; and truly, when we contemplate the state of the professing church, we cannot but see how terribly those consequences are being realized.

May God the Holy Ghost open the eyes of all Christians to the truth of these things, May He lead them to study the Scriptures, and to submit themselves to their holy authority in all things. This is the special need of this our day. We do not study Scripture sufficiently; we are not governed by it; we do not see the absolute necessity of testing everything by the light of Scripture, and rejecting all that will not stand the test; we go on with a quantity of things that have no foundation whatever in the Word – yea, that are positively opposed to it.

What must be the end of all this? We tremble to think of it. We know, blessed be God, that our Lord Jesus Christ will soon come and take His own beloved and blood-bought people home to the prepared place in the Father’s house, to be forever with Himself, in the ineffable blessedness of that bright home; but what of those who shall be left behind? what of that vast mass of baptized worldly profession? These are solemn questions, which must be weighed in the immediate presence of God, in order to have the true, the divine answer. Let the reader ponder them there, in all tenderness of heart and teachableness of spirit, and the Holy Ghost will lead him to the true answer.

## Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 compared: the Sabbath

Having sought to set forth, from various parts of Scripture, the glorious truth that believers are not under law, but under grace, we may now pursue our study of this fifth chapter of Deuteronomy. In it we have the ten commandments, but not exactly as we have them in the twentieth chapter of Exodus.

There are some characteristic touches which demand the reader's attention.

In Exodus 20, we have history; in Deuteronomy 5, we have not only history, but commentary. In the latter, the lawgiver presents moral motives, and makes appeals which would be wholly out of place in the former. In the one, we have naked facts; in the other, facts and comments – facts and their practical application. In a word, there is not the slightest ground for imagining that Deuteronomy 5 is intended to be a literal repetition of Exodus 20, and hence the miserable arguments which infidels ground upon their apparent divergence just crumble into dust beneath our feet. They are simply baseless, and utterly contemptible.

Let us, for instance, compare the two scriptures in reference to the subject of the Sabbath.

In Exodus 20, we read, **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”**

In Deuteronomy 5, we read, **“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that it within thy gates; that thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day”** (Ver. 12-15).

Now, the reader can see at a glance the difference between the two passages.

In Exodus 20, the command to keep the Sabbath is grounded on creation; in Deuteronomy 5, it is grounded on redemption, without any allusion to creation at all. In short, the points of difference arise out of the distinct character of each book, and are perfectly plain to every spiritual mind.

With regard to the institution of the Sabbath, we must remember that it rests wholly upon the direct authority of the Word of God.

Other commandments set forth plain moral duties. Every man knows it to be morally wrong to kill or steal; but as to the observance of the Sabbath, no one could possibly recognize it as a duty had it not been distinctly appointed by divine authority, hence its immense importance and interest. Both in our chapter and in Exodus 20, it stands side by side with all those great moral duties which are universally recognized by the human conscience.

And not only so, but we find, in various other scriptures, that the Sabbath is singled out and presented, with special prominence, as a precious link between the Lord and Israel, a seal of His covenant with them, and a powerful test of their devotedness to Him. Everyone could recognize the moral wrong of theft and murder; only those who loved the Lord and His word would love and honor His Sabbath.

Thus, in the sixteenth chapter of Exodus, in connection with the giving of the manna, we read,

**“And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man; and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, ‘This is that which the Lord hath said, To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to-day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you, to be kept until the morning.’ . . . And Moses said, ‘Eat that to-day; for to-day is a Sabbath unto the Lord; to-day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none.’ And it came to pass,”** – so little were they capable of appreciating the high and holy privilege of keeping the Lord’s Sabbath – **“that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws?’”**

Their neglect of the Sabbath proved their moral condition to be all wrong – proved them to be astray as to all the commandments and laws of God.

The Sabbath was the great touchstone – the measure and gauge of the real state of their hearts toward the Lord. **“See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day.”** They found rest and food on the holy Sabbath.

Again, at the close of chapter 31, we have a very remarkable passage in proof of the importance and interest attaching to the Sabbath in the mind of the Lord.

A full description of the tabernacle and its furniture had been given to Moses, and he was about to receive the two tables of testimony from the hand of the Lord; but, as if to prove the prominent place which the holy Sabbath held in the divine mind, we read,

**“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, ‘Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations)’ that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.**

**“Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death; for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:12-17).**

Now, this is a very important passage.. It proves very distinctly the abiding character of the Sabbath. The terms in which it is spoken of are quite sufficient to show that it was no mere temporary institution – **“A sign between Me and you throughout your generations.” – “A perpetual covenant.” – “A sign forever.”**

**Let the reader carefully mark these words. They prove, beyond all question, first, that the Sabbath was for Israel; secondly, that the Sabbath is, in the mind of God, a permanent institution. It is needful to bear these things in mind in order to avoid all vagueness of thought and looseness of expression on this deeply interesting subject.**

**The Sabbath was distinctly and exclusively for the Jewish nation. It is spoken of emphatically as a sign between the Lord and His people Israel. There is not the most remote hint of its being intended for the Gentiles. We shall see, further on, that it is a lovely type of the times of the restitution of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began; but this in no wise touches the fact of its being an exclusively Jewish institution. There is not so much as a single sentence of Scripture to show that the Sabbath had any reference whatever to the Gentiles.**

Some would teach us that inasmuch as we read of the Sabbath day in the second chapter of Genesis, it must, of necessity, have a wider range than the Jewish nation. But let us turn to the passage and see what it says:

**“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.”**

This is simple enough. There is no mention here of man at all. We are not told that man rested on the seventh day. Men may infer, conclude, or imagine that he did so; but the second of Genesis says nothing about it. And not only so, but we look in vain for any allusion to the Sabbath throughout the entire book of Genesis.

The very first notice we have of the Sabbath in connection with man, is in the sixteenth of Exodus, a passage already quoted; and there we see, most distinctly, that it was given to Israel, as a people in recognized covenant-relationship with the Lord. That they did not understand or appreciate it is perfectly plain; that they never entered into it is equally plain, according to Psalm 95 and Hebrews 4.

But we are now speaking of what it was in the mind of God; and He tells us it was a sign between Him and His people Israel, and a powerful test of their moral condition and of the state of their heart as to Him. It was not only an integral part of the law, as given by Moses to the congregation of Israel, but it is specially referred to and singled out, again and again, as an institution holding a very peculiar place in the mind of God.

Thus, in the book of the prophet Isaiah, we read,

**“Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people; neither let the eunuch say, Behold I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; even unto them will I give in Mine house, and within My walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughter’s: I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger,”** (here, of course, viewed in connection with Israel, as in Numbers 15 and other scriptures,) **“that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant; even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”**

Again, **“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it”** (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

The foregoing quotations are amply sufficient to show the place which the Sabbath holds in the mind of God.

It is needless to multiply passages, but there is just one to which we must refer the reader, in connection with our present subject, namely, Leviticus 23 – **“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings”** (Ver. 1-3).

Here it stands at the head of all the feasts given in this marvelous chapter, in which we have foreshadowed the entire history of God’s dealings with His people Israel. The Sabbath is the expression of God’s eternal rest, into which it is His purpose yet to bring His people, when all their toils and sorrows, their trials and tribulations, shall have passed away – that blessed “Sabbath-keeping [*σαββατισμος*]” which **“remaineth for the people of God.”**

In various ways He sought to keep this glorious rest before the hearts of His people; the seventh day, the seventh year, the year of jubilee – all these lovely sabbatic seasons were designed to set forth that blessed time when Israel shall be gathered back to their own beloved land, when the Sabbath shall be kept, in all its deep, divine blessedness, as it never has been kept yet.

And this leads us, naturally, to the second point in connection with the Sabbath, namely, its permanency.

This is plainly proved by such expressions as, **“perpetual,” “a sign forever,” “throughout your generations.”**

Such words would never be applied to any merely temporary institution. True it is, alas! That Israel never really kept the Sabbath according to God; they never understood its meaning, never entered into its blessedness, never drank into its spirit.

They made it a badge of their own righteousness; they boasted in it as a national institution, and used it for self-exaltation; but they never celebrated it in communion with God.

We speak of the nation as a whole. We doubt not there were precious souls who, in secret, enjoyed the Sabbath, and entered into the thoughts of God about it; but as a nation, Israel never kept the Sabbath according to God.

Hear what Isaiah says, **“Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting”** (Chap. 1:13).

Here we see that the precious and beautiful institution of the Sabbath which God had given as a sign of His covenant with His people, had, in their hands, become a positive abomination, perfectly intolerable to Him. And when we open the pages of the New Testament, we find the leaders and heads of the Jewish people continually at issue with our Lord Jesus Christ in reference to the Sabbath.

Look, for example, at the opening verses of Luke 6:

**“And it came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first, that He went through the corn-fields; and His disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, ‘Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days?’ And Jesus answering them said, ‘Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was a hungred, and they which were with him; how he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the show-bread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat, but for the priests alone?’ And He said unto them that the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.”**

And again, we read,

**“It came to pass also on another Sabbath, that He entered into the synagogue and taught; and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day, that they might find an accusation against Him”** (Only conceive, an accusation for healing a poor, afflicted fellow-mortal!) **“But He knew their thoughts”** – yes, He read their hearts through to their very center, **“and said to the man which had the withered hand, ‘Rise up, and stand forth in the midst.’ And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, ‘I will ask you one thing, Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?’ And looking round about upon them all, He said unto the man, ‘Stretch forth thine hand.’ And he did so; and his hand was restored whole as the other. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.”**

What an insight we have here into the hollowness and worthlessness of man’s Sabbath-keeping!

Those religious guides would rather let the disciples starve than have their Sabbath interfered with; they would allow the man to carry his withered hand to the grave rather than have him healed on their Sabbath. Alas! alas! it was indeed their Sabbath, and not God’s. His rest could never comport with hunger and withered hands. They had never read aright the record of David’s act in eating the show-bread. They did not understand that legal institutions must give way in the presence of divine grace meeting human need. Grace rises, in its magnificence, above all legal barriers, and faith rejoices in its lustre; but mere religiousness is offended by the activities of grace and the boldness of faith. The Pharisees did not see that the man with the withered hand was a striking commentary upon the nation’s moral condition, a living proof of the fact that they were far away from God. If they were as they ought to be, there would have been no withered hands to heal; but they were not, and hence their Sabbath was an empty formality – a powerless, worthless ordinance – a hideous anomaly, hateful to God, and utterly inconsistent with the condition of man.

Take another instance, in Luke 13 – **“And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath”** (Assuredly, the Sabbath was no day of rest to Him). **“And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, ‘Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.’ And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”**

Beautiful illustration of the work of grace in the soul, and the practical result, in every case. All on whom Christ lays His blessed hands are **“immediately made straight,”** and enabled to glorify God.

But man’s Sabbath was touched.

**“The ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day.”** He was indignant at the gracious work of healing, though quite indifferent as to the humiliating case of infirmity; and he **“said unto the people, ‘There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.’”**

How little this poor hollow religionist knew that he was in the very presence of the Lord of the true Sabbath! How utterly insensible he was to the moral inconsistency of attempting to keep a Sabbath while man's condition called aloud for divine work!

**“The Lord then answered him, and said, ‘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?’”**

What a withering rebuke! What an opening up of the hollowness and utter wretchedness of their whole system of Judaism! Only think of the glaring incongruity of a Sabbath and a daughter of Abraham bound by the cruel hand of Satan for eighteen years! There is nothing in all this world so blinding to the mind, so hardening to the heart, so deadening to the conscience, so demoralizing to the whole being, as religion without Christ.

Its deceiving and degrading power can only be thoroughly judged in the light of the divine presence. For aught that the ruler of the synagogue cared, that poor woman might have gone on to the end of her days bowed together and unable to lift up herself. He would have been well content to let her go on as a sad witness of the power of Satan, provided he could keep his Sabbath. His religious indignation was excited, not by the power of Satan as seen in the woman's condition, but by the power of Christ as seen in her complete deliverance.

But the Lord gave him his answer. **“And when He had said these things, all His adversaries were ashamed”** (as well they might); **“and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.”** What a striking contrast! The advocates of a powerless, heartless, worthless religion unmasked and covered with shame and confusion on the one hand, and on the other, all the people rejoicing in the glorious actings of the Son of God, who had come into their midst to deliver them from the crushing power of Satan, and fill their hearts with the joy of God's salvation, and their mouths with His praise!

We must now ask the reader to turn to the Gospel of John for further illustration of our subject. We earnestly desire that this vexed question of the Sabbath should be thoroughly examined in the light of Scripture. We are convinced that there is very much more involved in it than many professing Christians are aware. At the opening of John 5, we are introduced to a scene strikingly indicative of Israel's condition. We do not here attempt to go fully into the passage, we merely refer to it in connection with the subject before us.

The pool of Bethesda, or *“house of mercy”* – while it was undoubtedly the expression of the mercy of God toward His people – afforded abundant evidence of the miserable condition of man in general, and of Israel in particular. Its five porches were thronged with **“a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.”**

What a sample of the whole human family, and of the nation of Israel! What a striking illustration of their moral and spiritual condition as viewed from a divine stand-point. **“Blind, halt, withered”** – such is man's real state, if he only knew it.

But there was one man in the midst of this impotent throng so far gone – so feeble and helpless, that the pool of Bethesda could not meet his case.

**“A certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith unto him, ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’”**

What grace and power in this question! It went far beyond the utmost stretch of the impotent man’s thoughts. He thought only of human help, or of his own ability to get into the pool. He knew not that the speaker was above and beyond the pool, with its occasional movement – beyond angelic ministry – beyond all human help and effort, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and on earth.

**“The impotent man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.’”**

What a true picture of all those who are seeking salvation by ordinances! Each one doing the best he could for himself. No care for others. No thought of helping them.

**“Jesus saith unto him, ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.’ And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath.”**

Here we have man’s Sabbath again. It certainly was not God’s Sabbath. The miserable multitude gathered around the pool proved that God’s full rest had not yet come – that His glorious antitype of the Sabbath had not yet dawned on this sin-stricken earth. When that bright day comes, there will be no blind, halt, and withered folk thronging the porches of the pool of Bethesda. God’s Sabbath and human misery are wholly incompatible. But it was man’s Sabbath. It was no longer the seal of the Lord’s covenant with the seed of Abraham (as it was once, and will be again), but the badge of man’s self-righteousness.

**“The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, ‘It is the Sabbath day; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.’”**

It was no doubt lawful enough for him to lie on that bed, week after week, month after month, year after year, while they were going on with their empty, worthless, hollow attempt at Sabbath-keeping. If they had had one ray of spiritual light, they would have seen the flagrant inconsistency of attempting to maintain their traditionary notions respecting the Sabbath in the presence of human misery, disease, and degradation. But they were utterly blind, and hence when the glorious fruits of Christ’s ministry were being displayed, they had the temerity to pronounce them unlawful. Nor this only; but **“therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day.”**

What a spectacle! Religious people – yea, the leaders and teachers of religion – the guides of the professed people of God, seeking to slay the Lord of the Sabbath because He had made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day!

But mark our Lord's reply – **“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.”**

This brief but comprehensive statement gives us the root of the whole matter. It opens up to us the real condition of mankind in general, and of Israel in particular; and, in the most affecting manner, presents the grand secret of our Lord's life and ministry. Blessed be His name, He had not come into this world to rest. How could He rest? how could He keep a Sabbath in the midst of human need and misery?

Ought not that impotent, blind, halt, and withered multitude which thronged the porches of the pool of Bethesda have taught **“the Jews”** the folly of their notions about the Sabbath? For what was that multitude but a sample of the condition of the nation of Israel, and of the whole human family? and how could divine love rest in the midst of such a condition of things? Utterly impossible. Love can only be a worker in a scene of sin and sorrow.

From the moment of man's fall, the Father had been working; then the Son appeared to carry on the work; and now, the Holy Ghost is working. Work, and not rest, is the divine order in a world like this.

**“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”**

The blessed Lord Jesus went about doing good on the Sabbath day as well as on every other day; and finally, having accomplished the glorious work of redemption, He spent the Sabbath in the grave, and rose on the first day of the week, as the First begotten from the dead, and Head of the new creation, in which all things are of God, and to which, we may surely add, the question of **“days and months and times and years”** can have no possible application.

No one who thoroughly understands the meaning of death and resurrection could sanction for a moment the observance of days. The death of Christ put an end to all that order of things, and His resurrection introduces us into another sphere entirely, where it is our high privilege to walk in the light and power of those eternal realities which are ours in Christ, and which stand in vivid contrast with the superstitious observances of a carnal and worldly religiousness.

#### Difference between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day

But here we approach a very interesting point in our subject, namely, the difference between the Sabbath and the Lord's day, or first day of the week.

These two are often confounded. We frequently hear, from the lips of truly pious people, the phrase, “Christian Sabbath,” an expression nowhere to be found in the New Testament. It may be that some who make use of it mean a right thing; but we should not only mean right, but also seek to express ourselves according to the teaching of Holy Scripture.

We are persuaded that the enemy of God and of His Christ has had a great deal more to do with the conventionalisms of Christendom than many of us are aware; and this it is which makes the matter so very serious.

The reader may perhaps feel disposed to pronounce it mere hair-splitting to find any fault with the term “Christian Sabbath;” but he may rest assured it is nothing of the sort: on the contrary, if he will only calmly examine the matter in the light of the New Testament, he will find that it involves questions not only interesting, but also weighty and important. It is a common saying, “There is nothing in a name;” but in the matter now before us, there is much in a name.

We have already remarked that our Lord spent the Sabbath in the grave. Is not this a telling and deeply significant fact?

We cannot doubt it. We read in it, at least, the setting aside of the old condition of things, and the utter impossibility of keeping a Sabbath in a world of sin and death. Love could not rest in a world like this; it could only labor and die. This is the inscription which we read on the tomb where the Lord of the Sabbath lay buried.

But what of the first day of the week? Is not it the Sabbath on a new footing – the Christian Sabbath?

It is never so called in the New Testament. There is not so much as a hint of anything of the kind. If we look through the Acts of the Apostles, we shall find the two days spoken of in the most distinct way.

On the Sabbath, we find the Jews assembled in their synagogues for the reading of the law and the prophets: on the first day of the week, we find the Christians assembled to break bread. The two days were as distinct as Judaism and Christianity; nor is there so much as a shadow of Scripture foundation for the idea that the Sabbath was merged in the first day of the week. Where is the slightest authority for the assertion that the Sabbath is changed from the seventh day to the eighth, or first, day of the week? Surely, if there be any, nothing is easier than to produce it; but there is absolutely none.

And be it remembered that the Sabbath is not merely a seventh day, but the seventh day.

It is well to note this, inasmuch as some entertain the idea that provided a seventh portion of time be given to rest and the public ordinances of religion, it is quite sufficient, and it does not matter what you call it; and thus different nations and different religious systems have their Sabbath day. But this can never satisfy anyone who desires to be taught exclusively by Scripture.

The Sabbath of Eden was the seventh day: the Sabbath for Israel was the seventh day. But the eighth day leads our thoughts onward into eternity; and, in the New Testament, it is called “**the first day of the week,**” as indicating the beginning of that new order of things of which the Cross is the imperishable foundation, and a risen Christ the glorious Head and Center.

To call this day the “Christian Sabbath” is simply to confound things earthly and heavenly; it is to bring the Christian down from his elevated position as associated with a risen and glorified Head in the heavens, and occupy him with the Superstitious observance of days, the very thing which made the blessed apostle stand in doubt of the assemblies in Galatia.

In short, the more deeply we ponder the phrase “Christian Sabbath,” the more we are convinced that its tendency is, like many other formularies of Christendom, to rob the Christian of all those grand distinctive truths of the New Testament which mark off the Church of God from all that went before and all that is to follow after. The Church, though on the earth, is not of this world, even as Christ is not of this world. It is heavenly in its origin, heavenly in its character, heavenly in its principles, walk, and hope. It stands between the Cross and the glory. The boundaries of its existence on earth are, the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down to form it, and the coming of Christ to receive it to Himself.

Nothing can be more strongly marked than this; and hence, for anyone to attempt to enjoin upon the Church of God the legal or superstitious observance of “**days and months and times and years,**” is to falsify the entire Christian position, mar the integrity of divine revelation, and rob the Christian of the place and portion which belong to him through the infinite grace of God and the accomplished atonement of Christ.

Does the reader deem this statement unwarrantably strong? If so, let him ponder the following splendid passage from Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians – a passage which ought to be written in letters of gold: “**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him; rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil [or make a prey of] you through philosophy and vain deceit**” – mark the combination! not very flattering to philosophy – “**after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead [θεοτης, deity] bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power.**”

What more can we possibly want? “**In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.**”

Magnificent victory! A victory gained single-handed – gained for us! Universal and eternal homage to His peerless name! What remains?

“**Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.**”

- What can one who is complete and accepted in a risen and glorified Christ have to do with meats, drinks, or holy days?
- What can philosophy, tradition, or human religiousness do for him?
- What can passing shadows add to one who has grasped, by faith, the eternal substance?

Surely nothing; and hence the blessed apostle proceeds – **“Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, [such as,] ‘Touch not [this],’ ‘Taste not [that],’ ‘Handle not [the other]’; which all are to perish with the using; after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh;”** that is, not giving the measure of honor to the body which is due to it as God’s vessel, but puffing up the :flesh with religious pride, fed by a hollow and worthless sanctimoniousness. (Colossians 2:6-23).

We do not dare to offer any apology for this lengthened quotation.

An apology for quoting Scripture! Far be the thought! It is not possible for anyone to understand this marvelous passage and not have a complete settlement, not only of the Sabbath question, but also of that entire system of things with which this question stands connected.

The Christian who understands his position, is done forever with all questions of meats and drinks, days and months and times and years.

- He knows nothing of holy seasons and holy places.
- He is dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, and as such, is delivered from all the ordinances of a traditionary religion.
- He belongs to Heaven, where new moons, holy days, and Sabbaths have no place.
- He is in the new creation, where all things are of God; and hence he can see no moral force in such words as **“Touch not, taste not, handle not.”**

They have no possible application to him.

- He lives in a region where the clouds, vapors, and mists of monasticism and asceticism are never seen.
- He has given up all the worthless forms of mere fleshly pietism, and got, in exchange, the solid realities of Christian life.

His ear has been opened to hear, and his heart to understand, the powerful exhortation of the inspired apostle, **“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.”**

Here we have unfolded before our eyes some of the glories of true, practical, vital Christianity, in striking contrast with all the barren and dreary forms of carnal and worldly religiousness.

Christian life does not consist in the observance of certain rules, commandments, or traditions of men. It is a divine reality.

- It is Christ in the heart, and Christ reproduced in the daily life, by the power of the Holy Ghost.
- It is the new man, formed on the model of Christ Himself, and displaying itself in all the most minute details of our daily history – in the family, in the business, in all our intercourse with our fellow-men, in our temper, spirit, style, deportment, all.
- It is not a matter of mere profession, or of dogma, or of opinion, or of sentiment; it is an unmistakable, living reality.
- It is the kingdom of God, set up in the heart, asserting its blessed sway over the whole moral being, and shedding its genial influence upon the entire sphere in which we are called to move from day to day.
- It is the Christian walking in the blessed footsteps of Him who went about doing good; meeting, so far as in him lies, every form of human need; living not for himself, but for others; finding his delight in serving and giving; ready to soothe and sympathize wherever he finds a crushed spirit or a bereaved and desolate heart.

This is Christianity. And oh, how it differs from all the forms in which legality and superstition clothe themselves!

- How different from the unintelligent and unmeaning observance of days and months and times and years, abstaining from meats, forbidding to marry, and such like!
- How different from the vaporings of the mystic, the gloom of the ascetic, and the austerities of the monk!
- How totally different from all these!

Yes, reader; and we may add, how different from the unsightly union of high profession and low practice – lofty truths held in the intellect, professed, taught, and discussed, and worldliness, self-indulgence, and unsubduedness!

The Christianity of the New Testament differs alike from all these things. It is the divine, the heavenly, and the spiritual, displayed amid the human, the earthly, and the natural. May it be the holy purpose of the writer and the reader of these lines to be satisfied with nothing short of that morally glorious Christianity revealed in the pages of the New Testament.

It is needless, we trust, to add more on the question of the Sabbath. If the reader has at all seized the import of those scriptures which have passed before us, he will have little difficulty in seeing the place which the Sabbath holds in the dispensational ways of God. He will see that it has direct reference to Israel and the earth – that it was a sign of the covenant between the Lord and His earthly people, and a powerful test of their moral condition.

Furthermore, he will see that Israel never really kept the Sabbath, never understood its import, never appreciated its value. This was made manifest in the life, ministry, and death of our Lord Jesus Christ; who performed many of His works of healing on the Sabbath day, and, at the end, spent that day in the tomb.

Finally, he will clearly understand the difference between the Jewish Sabbath and the first day of the week, or the Lord's day; that the latter is never once called the Sabbath in the New Testament, but on the contrary, is constantly presented in its own proper distinctness: it is not the Sabbath changed or transferred, but a new day altogether, having its own special basis and its own peculiar range of thought, leaving the Sabbath wholly untouched, as a suspended institution, to be resumed by and by, when the seed of Abraham shall be restored to their own land. (See Ezekiel 46:1, 12).

### The Lord's Day

But we cannot happily turn from this interesting subject without a few words on the place assigned, in the New Testament, to the Lord's day, or first day of the week. Though it is not the Sabbath; and though it has nothing to do with holy days, or new moons, or **"days and months and times and years;"** yet it has its own unique place in Christianity, as is evident from manifold passages in the scriptures of the New Testament.

- Our Lord rose from the dead on that day;
- He met His disciples again and again on that day;
- The apostle and the brethren at Troas came together to break bread on that day (Acts 20:7);

The apostle instructs the Corinthians, and all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to lay by their offerings on that day; thus teaching us, distinctly, that the first day of the week was the special day for the Lord's people to assemble for the Lord's supper, and the worship, communion, and ministry connected with that most precious institution.

The blessed apostle John expressly tells us that he was in the Spirit on that day, and received that marvelous revelation which closes the Divine Volume. \*

**\* Some are of opinion that the expression, "on the Lord's day" ought to be rendered, "on the day of the Lord," meaning that the apostle was in the spirit of that day when our Lord Christ shall take to Himself His great power and reign. But to this view there are two grave objections. In the first place, the words  $\tau\eta\ \kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\alpha\kappa\eta\ \eta\mu\epsilon\rho\alpha$  rendered, in Revelation 1:10, "The Lord's day," are quite distinct from  $\eta\ \eta\mu\epsilon\rho\alpha\ \kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  in I Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10, properly rendered, "The day of the Lord."**

**This we consider a very weighty objection, and one quite sufficient to settle the question. But in addition to this, we have the argument based on the fact that by far the greater portion of the book of Revelation is occupied, not with "the day of the Lord," but with events prior thereto.**

**Hence, therefore, we feel persuaded that "the Lord's day" and "the first day of the week" are identical; and this we deem a very important fact, as proving that that day has a very special place in the Word of God – a place which every intelligent Christian will thankfully own.**

Thus, then, we have a body of Scripture evidence before us amply sufficient to prove to every pious mind that the Lord's day must not be reduced to the level of ordinary days.

It is, to the true Christian, neither the Jewish Sabbath on the one hand, nor the Gentile Sunday on the other; but the Lord's Day, on which His people gladly and thankfully assemble around His table, to keep that precious feast by which they show forth His death until He come.

Now, it is needless to say that there is not a shade of legal bondage or of superstition connected with the first day of the week.

To say so, or to think so, would be to deny the entire circle of truths with which that day stands connected. We have no direct commandment respecting the observance of the day, but the passages already referred to are amply sufficient for every spiritual mind; and further, we may say that the instincts of the divine nature would lead every true Christian to honor and love the Lord's day, and to set it apart, in the most reverent manner, for the worship and service of God. The very thought of anyone professing to love Christ engaging in business or unnecessary traveling on the Lord's day, would, in our judgment, be revolting to every pious feeling. We believe it to be a hallowed privilege to retire, as much as possible, from all the distractions of natural things, and to devote the hours of the Lord's day to Himself and to His service.

It will perhaps be said that the Christian ought to devote every day to the Lord.

Most surely; we are the Lord's, in the very fullest and highest sense. All we have and all we are belongs to Him; this we fully, gladly own. We are called to do everything in His name and to His glory. It is our high privilege to buy and sell, eat and drink, yea, to carry on all our business, under His eye, and in the fear and love of His holy name.

We should not put our hand to anything, on any day in the week, on which we could not, with the fullest confidence, ask the Lord's blessing.

All this is most fully admitted. Every true Christian joyfully owns it. But, at the same time, we deem it impossible to read the New Testament and not see that the Lord's day gets a unique place; that it is marked off for us, in the most distinct way: that it has a significance and an importance which cannot, with justice, be claimed for any other day in the week. Indeed, so fully are we convinced of the truth of all this, that even though it were not the law of England that the Lord's day should be observed, we should deem it to be both our sacred duty and holy privilege to abstain from all business engagements, save such as were absolutely unavoidable.

Thanks be to God, it is the law of England that the Lord's day should be observed. This is a signal mercy to all who love the day for the Lord's sake. We cannot but own His great goodness in having wrested the day from the Covetous grasp of the world, and bestowed it upon His people and His servants to be devoted to His Worship and to His work.

What a boon is the Lord's Day, with its profound retirement from worldly things! What should we do without it?

- What a blessed break in upon the week's toil!
- How refreshing its exercises to the spiritual mind!
- How precious the assembly around the Lord's table to remember Him, to show forth His death, and celebrate His praise!
- How delightful the varied services of the Lord's day, whether those of the evangelist, the pastor, the teacher, the Sunday-school worker, or the tract distributor!

What human language can adequately set forth the value and interest of all these things? True it is that the Lord's Day is anything but a day of bodily rest to His servants; indeed, they are often more fatigued on that day than on any other day of the week. But oh! it is a blessed fatigue – a delightful fatigue – a fatigue which will meet its bright reward in the rest that remains for the people of God.

Once more, then, beloved Christian reader, let us lift up our hearts in a note of praise to our God for the blessed boon of the Lord's Day. May He continue it to His Church until He come. May He countervail, by His almighty power, every effort of the infidel and the atheist to remove the barriers which English law has erected around the Lord's Day. Truly, it will be a sad day for England when those barriers are removed.

It may perhaps be said by some that the Jewish Sabbath is done away, and is therefore no longer binding. A large number of professing Christians have taken this ground, and pleaded for the opening of the parks and places of public recreation on the Sunday. Alas! it is easily seen where such people are drifting to, and what they are seeking. They would set aside the law, in order to procure a license for fleshly indulgence. They do not understand that the only way in which anyone can be free from the law is by being dead to it; and if dead to the law, we are also, of blessed necessity, dead to sin and dead to the world.

This makes it a different matter altogether.

The Christian is, thank God, free from the law; but if he is, it is not that he may amuse and indulge himself, on the Lord's day or any other day, but that he may live to God. **"I through the law am dead to law, that I might live unto God."**

This is Christian ground, and it can only be occupied by those who are truly born of God. The world cannot understand it; neither can they understand the holy privileges and spiritual exercises of the Lord's day.

All this is true; but, at the same time, we are thoroughly convinced that were England to remove the barriers which surround the Lord's day, it would afford a melancholy proof of her abandonment of that profession of religion which has so long characterized her as a nation, and of her drifting away in the direction of infidelity and atheism.

We must not lose sight of the weighty fact that England has taken the ground of being a Christian nation – a nation professing to be governed by the Word of God. She is therefore much more responsible than those nations wrapped in the dark shades of heathenism.

We believe that nations, like individuals, will be held responsible for the profession they make; and hence those nations which profess and call themselves Christian shall be judged, not merely by the light of creation, nor by the law of Moses, but by the full-orbed light of that Christianity which they profess – by all the truth contained within the covers of that blessed book which they possess, and in which they make their boast.

The heathen shall be judged on the ground of creation; the Jew, on the ground of the law; the nominal Christian, on the ground of the truth of Christianity.

Now this grave fact renders the position of England, and all other professing Christian nations, most serious. God will most assuredly deal with them on the ground of their profession. It is of no use to say they do not understand what they profess; for why profess what they do not understand and believe?

The fact is, they profess to understand and believe; and by this fact they shall be judged. They make their boast in this familiar sentence, that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants.

If this be so, how solemn is the thought of England judged by the standard of an open Bible! What will be her judgment? – what her end? Let all whom it may concern ponder the appalling answer.

We must now turn from the deeply interesting subject of the Sabbath and the Lord's day, and draw this section to a close by quoting for the reader the remarkable paragraph with which our chapter ends. It does not call for any lengthened comment, but we deem it profitable, in these "*Notes on Deuteronomy*," to furnish the reader with very full quotations from the book itself, in order that he may have before him the very words of the Holy Ghost, without even the trouble of laying aside the volume which he holds in his hand.

#### Fear of the Lord and the Loving Heart

Having laid before the people the ten commandments, the lawgiver proceeds to remind them of the solemn circumstances which accompanied the giving of the law, together with their own feelings and utterances on the occasion.

**"These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me. And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; and ye said, 'Behold, the Lord our God hath showed us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire; we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die.**

**“For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it and do it.’ And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken.**

**“O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever! Go say to them, Get you into your tents again. But as for thee, stand thou here by Me, and I will speak unto thee all the commandments. and the statutes. and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it.’ Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside either to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess.”**

Here the grand principle of the book of Deuteronomy shines out with uncommon luster.

It is embodied in those touching and forcible words which form the very heart’s core of the splendid passage just quoted – **“O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!”**

Precious words! They set before us, most blessedly, the secret spring of that life which we, as Christians, are called to live from day to day – the life of simple, implicit, and unqualified obedience, namely, a heart fearing the Lord – fearing Him, not in a servile spirit, but with all that deep, true, adoring love which the Holy Ghost sheds abroad in our hearts.

It is this that delights the heart of our loving Father – His word to us is, **“My son, give Me thine heart.”**

Where the heart is given, all follows, in lovely moral order. A loving heart finds its very deepest joy in obeying all God’s commandments; and nothing is of any value to God but what springs from a loving heart. The heart is the source of all the issues of life; and hence, when it is governed by the love of God, there is a loving response to all His commandments.

We love His commandments because We love Him. Every word of His is precious to the heart that loves Him. Every precept, every statute, every judgment – in a word, His whole law is loved, revered, and obeyed, because it has His name and His authority attached to it.

The reader will find in Psalm 119 an uncommonly fine illustration of the special point now before us – a most striking example of One who blessedly answered to the Words quoted above – **“O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always!”**

It is the lovely breathing of a soul who found its deep, unfailing, Constant delight in the law of God. There are no less than one hundred and seventy allusions to that precious law, under some one title or another. We find scattered along the surface of this marvelous psalm, in rich profusion, such gems as the following:

- **"Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee."**
- **"I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies as much as in all riches."**
- **"I will meditate in Thy precepts, and have respect unto Thy ways."**
- **"I will delight myself in Thy statutes; I will not forget Thy Word."**
- **"My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto Thy judgments at all times."**
- **"Thy testimonies are also my delight, and my Counselors."**
- **"I have stuck unto Thy testimonies."**
- **"Behold, I have longed after Thy precepts."**
- **"I trust in Thy Word."**
- **"I have hoped in Thy judgments."**
- **"I seek Thy precepts."**
- **"I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved."**
- **"I remembered Thy judgments."**
- **"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."**
- **"I turned my feet unto Thy testimonies."**
- **"I have believed Thy commandments."**
- **"The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."**
- **"I have hoped in Thy Word."**
- **"Thy law is my delight."**
- **"Mine eyes fail for Thy Word."**
- **"All Thy commandments are faithful."**
- **"Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven."**
- **"I will never forget Thy precepts."**
- **"I have sought Thy precepts."**
- **"I will consider Thy testimonies."**
- **"Thy commandment is exceeding broad."**
- **"O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day."**
- **"How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth."**
- **"Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage forever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart."**
- **"I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually."**
- **"I love Thy commandments above gold, yea, above find gold."**
- **"I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right."**
- **"Thy testimonies are wonderful."**
- **"I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Thy commandments."**
- **"Upright are Thy judgments."**
- **"Thy testimonies . . . are righteous, and very faithful."**
- **"Thy Word is very pure."**
- **"Thy law is the truth."**
- **"The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting."**
- **"All Thy commandments are truth."**

- **“Thy Word is true from the beginning; and everyone of Thy righteous judgments endureth forever.”**
- **“My heart standeth in awe of Thy Word.”**
- **“I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil.”**
- **“Great peace have they that love Thy law.”**
- **“My soul hath kept Thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.”**
- **“I have chosen Thy precepts.”**
- **“Thy law is my delight.”**

Truly, it does the heart good, and refreshes the spirit, to transcribe such utterances as the foregoing, many of which are the suited utterances of our Lord Himself, in the days of His :flesh.

- He ever lived upon the Word.
- It was the food of His soul,
- The authority of His path,
- The material of His ministry.
  
- By it He vanquished Satan;
- By it He silenced Sadducees, Pharisees, and Herodians;
- By it He taught His disciples;
- To it He commended His servants, as He was about to ascend into the heavens.

How important is all this for us!

How intensely interesting! How deeply practical! What a place it gives the Holy Scriptures! For we remember that it is, in very deed, the blessed Volume of inspiration which is brought before us in all those golden sentences culled from Psalm 119. How strengthening, refreshing, and encouraging for us to mark the way in which our Lord uses the Holy Scriptures at all times, the place He gives them, and the dignity He puts upon them! He appeals to them on all occasions as a divine authority from which there can be no appeal. He, though Himself as God over all, the Author of the Volume, having taken His place as man on the earth, sets forth with all possible plainness what is man’s bounden duty and high privilege, namely, to live by the Word of God, to bow down in reverent subjection to its divine authority.

And have we not here a very complete answer to the oft-raised question of infidelity, “How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God?”

If indeed we believe in Christ – if we own Him to be the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh, very God and very man, we cannot fail to see the moral force of the fact that this divine Person constantly appeals to the Scriptures – to Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms, as to a divine standard. Did He not know them to be the Word of God? Undoubtedly. As God, He had given them; as Man, He received them, lived by them, and owned their paramount authority, in all things.

What a weighty fact is here for the professing church!

What a withering rebuke to all those so called Christian doctors and writers who have presumed to tamper with the grand fundamental truth of the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures in general, and of the five books of Moses in particular! How terrible to think of the professed teachers of the Church of God daring to designate as spurious, writings which our Lord and Master received and owned as divine!

### The Gospel in the World: Not Conversion – but Apostasy

And yet we are told, and we are expected to believe that things are improving! Alas! alas! it is a miserable delusion.

The degrading absurdities of ritualism, and the blasphemous reasonings of infidelity, are rapidly increasing around us; and where these influences are not actually dominant, we observe, for the most part, a cold indifference, carnal ease, self-indulgence, and worldliness – anything and everything, in short, but the evidence of improvement. If people are not led away by infidelity on the one hand, or by ritualism on the other, it is, for the most part, owing to the fact that they are too much occupied with pleasure and gain to think of anything else. And as to the religion of the day, if you subtract money and music, you will have a lamentably trifling balance.

Hence, therefore, it is impossible to shake off the conviction that the combined testimony of observation and experience is directly opposed to the notion that things are improving. Indeed, for anyone, in the face of such an array of evidence to the contrary, to cling to such a theory, can only be regarded as the fruit of a most unaccountable credulity. But perhaps some may feel disposed to say that we must not judge by the sight of our eyes; we must be hopeful. True, provided only we have a divine warrant for our hopefulness.

If a single line of Scripture can be produced to prove that the present system of things is to be marked by gradual improvement, religiously, politically, morally, or socially, then, by all means, be hopeful. Yes; hope against hope. A single clause of inspiration is quite sufficient to form the basis of a hope which will lift the heart above the very darkest and most depressing surroundings.

But where is such a clause to be found? Simply nowhere. The testimony of the Bible, from cover to cover; the distinct teaching of Holy Scripture, from beginning to end; the voices of prophets and apostles, in unbroken harmony – all, without a single divergent note, go to prove, with a force and clearness perfectly unanswerable, that the present condition of things, so far from gradually improving, will rapidly grow worse; that ere the bright beams of millennial glory can gladden this groaning earth, the sword of judgment must do its appalling work.

To quote the passages to proof of our assertion would literally fill a volume; it would simply be to transcribe a large portion of the prophetic scriptures of the Old and New Testament. This, of course, we do not attempt. There is no need. The reader has his Bible before him; let him search it diligently. Let him lay aside all his preconceived ideas, all the conventionalisms of Christendom, all the ordinary phraseology of the religious world, all the dogmas of the schools of divinity, and come, with the simplicity of a little child, to the pure fountain of Holy Scripture, and drink in its heavenly teaching.

If he will only do this, he will rise from the study with the clear and settled conviction that the world will, most assuredly, not be converted by the means now in operation – that it is not the Gospel of peace, but the besom of destruction that shall prepare the earth for glory.

Is it, then, that we deny the good that is being done? Are we insensible to it? Far be the thought!

We heartily bless God for every atom of it.

We rejoice in every effort put forth to spread the precious Gospel of the grace of God; we render thanks for every soul gathered within the blessed circle of God's salvation. We delight to think of eighty-five millions of Bibles scattered over the earth. What human mind can calculate the results of all these, yea, the results of a single copy? We earnestly wish Godspeed to every true-hearted missionary who goes forth with the glad tidings of salvation, whether into the lanes and court-yards of London, or to the most distant parts of the earth.

But, admitting all this, as we most heartily do, we nevertheless do not believe in the conversion of the world by the means now in operation.

Scripture tells us that it is when the divine judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world shall learn righteousness. This one clause of inspiration ought to be sufficient to prove that it is not by the Gospel that the world is to be converted; and there are hundreds of clauses which speak the same language and teach the same truth. It is not by grace, but by judgment, that the inhabitants of the world shall learn righteousness.

What, then, is the object of the Gospel? If it be not to convert the world, for what purpose is it preached?

The apostle James, in his address at the memorable council at Jerusalem, gives an answer, direct and conclusive, to the question. He says, "**Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles.**" For what? To convert them all? The very reverse – "**To take out of them a people for His name.**"

Nothing can be more distinct than this. It sets before us that which ought to be the grand object of all missionary effort – that which every divinely sent and divinely taught missionary will keep before his mind in all his blessed labors. It is "**to take out a people for His name.**"

How important to remember this! How needful to have ever before us a true object in all our work! Of what possible use can it be to work for a false object? Is it not much better to work with a direct view to what God is doing?

Will it cripple the missionary's energies, or clip his wings, to keep before his eyes the divine purpose in his work? Surely not.

Take the case of two missionaries going forth to some distant mission-field: the one has for his object the conversion of the world; the other, the gathering out of a people.

Will the latter, by reason of his object, be less devoted, less energetic, less enthusiastic, than the former? We cannot believe it; on the contrary, the very fact of his being in the current of the divine mind will impart stability and consistency to his work, and, at the same time, encourage his heart in the face of the difficulties and hindrances which surround him.

But however this may be, it is perfectly plain that the apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had no such object, in going forth to their work, as the conversion of the world.

**“Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”**

This was to the twelve. The world was to be their sphere. The aspect of their message was, unto every creature; the application, to him that believeth. It was pre-eminently an individual thing. The conversion of the whole world was not to be their object; that will be effected by a different agency altogether, when God’s present action by the Gospel shall have resulted in the gathering out of a people for the heavens. \*

**\* We would commend to the reader’s attention Psalm 72. It is one of a large class of passages which prove that the blessing of the nations is consequent upon Israel’s restoration. “God be merciful unto us [Israel], and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us, that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations . . . God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” There could not be a more lovely or forcible proof of the fact that it is Israel, and not the Church, that will be used for the blessing of the nations.**

The Holy Ghost came down on the day of Pentecost, not to convert the world, but to “**convict** [ελεγχει]” it, or demonstrate its guilt in having rejected the Son of God. \*

**\* The application of John 16:8-11 to the Spirit’s work in the individual is, in our judgment, a serious mistake. It refers to the effect of His presence on earth, in reference to the world as a whole. His work in the soul is a precious truth, we need hardly say, but it is not the truth taught in this passage.**

The effect of His presence was to prove the world guilty; and as to the grand object of His mission, it was to form a body composed of believers from amongst both Jews and Gentiles. With this He has been occupied for the last eighteen hundred years. This is “**the mystery**” of which the apostle Paul was made a minister, and which he unfolds, so fully and blessedly, in his Epistle to the Ephesians.

It is impossible for anyone to understand the truth set forth in this marvelous document, and not see that the conversion of the world and the formation of the body of Christ are two totally different things, which could not possibly go on together.

Let the reader ponder the following beautiful passage:

**“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the. mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men” – not made known in the scriptures of the Old Testament, nor revealed to the Old Testament saints or prophets – “as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets” (that is, to the New Testament prophets) “by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel: whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the dispensation [οικονομία] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:1-10).**

Take another passage from the Epistle to the Colossians:

**“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister, who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the Church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to complete the Word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily” (Chap. 1:23-29).**

From these and numerous other passages, the reader may see the special object of Paul’s ministry. Assuredly he had no such thought in his mind as the conversion of the world. True, he preached the Gospel, in all its depth, fullness, and power – preached it **“from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum” – “preached among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,”** but with no thought of converting the world. He knew better. He knew and taught that the world was ripening for judgment – yes, ripening rapidly; that **“evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse;”** that **“in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to many, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God had created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”**

And further still, this faithful and divinely inspired witness taught that **“in the last days” – far in advance of “the latter times” – “perilous [or difficult] times shall come.**

**“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”** (Compare I Timothy 4:1-3 with II Timothy 3:1-5).

What a picture! It brings us back to the close of the first of Romans, where the same inspired pen portrays for us the dark forms of heathenism; but with this terrible difference, that in II Timothy it is not heathenism, but nominal Christianity – **“a form of godliness.”**

And is this to be the end of the present condition of things? Is this the converted world of which we hear so much? Alas! Alas! there are false prophets abroad; there are those who cry, Peace, peace, when there is no peace; there are those who attempt to daub the crumbling walls of Christendom with untempered mortar.

But it will not do. Judgment is at the door. The professing church has utterly, shamefully failed; she has grievously departed from the Word of God, and revolted from the authority of her Lord. There is not a single ray of hope for Christendom. It is the darkest moral blot in the wide universe of God, or on the page of history.

The same blessed apostle from whose writings we have already so largely quoted, tells us that **“the mystery of iniquity doth already work;”** hence it has been working now for over eighteen centuries.

**“Only He that now hindereth will hinder until He be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness”** (II Thessalonians 2:7-12).

How awful is the doom of Christendom! Strong delusion! Dark damnation! And all this in the face of the dreams of those false prophets who talk to the people about “the bright side of things.”

Thank God, there is a bright side for all those who belong to Christ. To them, the apostle can speak in bright and cheering accents – **“We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (II Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

Here we have, most surely, the bright side of things – the bright and blessed hope of the Church of God – the hope of seeing **“the bright and morning Star.”**

All rightly instructed Christians are on the look-out, not for an improved or a converted world, but for their coming Lord and Saviour, who has gone to prepare a place for them in the Father's house, and is coming again to receive them to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also. This is His own sweet promise, which may be fulfilled at any moment. He only waits, as Peter tells us, in long-suffering mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But when the last member shall be incorporated, by the Holy Ghost, into the blessed body of Christ, then shall the voice of the archangel and the trump of God summon all the redeemed, from the beginning, to meet their descending Lord in the air, to be forever with Him.

This is the true and proper hope of the Church of God – a hope which He would have ever shining down into the hearts of all His beloved people, in its purifying and elevating power. Of this blessed hope the enemy has succeeded in robbing a large number of the Lord's people. Indeed, for centuries it was well-nigh blotted out from the Church's horizon; and it has only been partially recovered within the last fifty years. And, alas! how partially! Where do we hear of it, throughout the length and breadth of the professing Church? Do the pulpits of Christendom ring with the joyful sound, **"Behold the Bridegroom cometh"**? Far from it.

Even the few beloved servants of Christ who are looking for His coming, hardly dare to preach it, because they fear it would be utterly rejected. And so it would. We are thoroughly persuaded that, in the vast majority of cases, men who should venture to preach the glorious truth that the Lord is coming for His Church, would speedily have to vacate their pulpits.

What a solemn and striking proof of Satan's blinding power!

He has robbed the Church of her divinely given hope, and instead thereof, he has given her a delusion – a lie. Instead of looking out for "the bright and morning Star," he has set her looking for a Converted world – a millennium without Christ. He has Succeeded in casting such a haze over the future, that the Church has completely lost her bearings. She does not know where she is. She is like a vessel tossed on the stormy ocean, having neither compass nor rudder, seeing neither sun nor stars. All is darkness and confusion.

And how is this? Simply because the Church has lost sight of the pure and precious word of her Lord, and accepted instead those bewildering creeds and confessions of men which so mar and mutilate the truth of God that Christians seem utterly at sea as to their proper standing and their proper hope.

And yet they have the Bible in their hands. True; but so had the Jews, and yet they rejected that blessed One who is the great theme of the Bible from beginning to end. This was the moral inconsistency with which our Lord charged them in John 5:

**"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me; and ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life." \***

**\* The word *ἐρευνάτε* may be either imperative or indicative; but the context, we judge, demands the latter.**

**They had the Scriptures; they were read in their synagogues every Sabbath day; they professed to believe that in them they had eternal life; they testified of Him; and yet they would not come to Him. Here was the flagrant inconsistency. Now, if ἐρευνᾶτε be taken as a command, the whole force of the passage is lost.**

**Need we remind the reader that there are plenty of arguments and inducements leading us to search the Scriptures, without appealing to what we believe to be an inaccurate rendering of John 5:39?**

And why was this? Simply because their minds were blinded by religious prejudice. They were under the influence of the doctrines and commandments of men. Hence, although they had the Scriptures, and boasted of having them, they were as ignorant of them, and as little governed by them, as the poor dark heathen around them. It is one thing to have the Bible in our hands, in our homes, and in our assemblies, and quite another thing to have the truths of the Bible acting on our hearts and consciences, and shining in our lives.

Take, for instance, the great subject now before us, and which has led us into this very lengthened digression. Can anything be more plainly taught in the New Testament than this, namely, that the end of the present condition of things will be terrible apostasy from the truth, and open rebellion against God and the Lamb? The Gospels, the epistles, and the Revelation all agree in setting forth this most solemn truth, with such distinctness and simplicity that a babe in Christ may see it. And yet how few, comparatively, believe it! The vast majority believe the very reverse. They believe that by means of the various agencies now in operation all nations shall be converted.

In vain we call attention to our Lord's parables in Matthew 13, the tares, the leaven, and the mustard-seed. How do these agree with the idea of a converted world? If the whole world is to be converted by a preached Gospel, how is it that tares are found in the field at the end of the age? how is it that there are as many foolish virgins as wise ones when the Bridegroom comes? If the whole world is to be converted by the Gospel, then on whom will **"the day of the Lord so come as a thief in the night"**? Or what mean those awful words, **"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape"**?

In view of a converted world, what would be the just application, what the moral force, of those most solemn words in the first of Revelation, **"Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him"**?

Where are all those wailing kindreds to be found if the whole world is to be converted? Reader, is it not as clear as a sunbeam that the two things cannot stand for a moment together? Is it not perfectly plain that the theory of a world converted by the Gospel is diametrically opposed to the teaching of the entire New Testament? How is it, then, that the vast majority of professing Christians persist in holding it? There can be but the one reply, and that is, they do not bow to the authority of Scripture.

It is most sorrowful and solemn to have to say it; but it is, alas! too true. The Bible is read in Christendom, but the truths of the Bible are not believed – nay, they are persistently rejected; and all this in view of the oft-repeated – boast that “the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants.”

But we shall not pursue this subject further here, much as we feel its weight and importance.

We trust the reader may be led by the Spirit of God to feel its deep solemnity. We believe the Lord’s people everywhere need to be thoroughly roused to a sense of how entirely the professing church has departed from the authority of Scripture. Here, we may rest assured, lies the real cause of all the confusion, all the error, all the evil, in our midst. We have departed from the Word of the Lord, and from Himself. Until this is seen, felt, and owned, we cannot be right. The Lord looks for true repentance, real brokenness of spirit, in His presence. **“To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word.”**

This always holds good. There is no limit to the blessing when the soul is in this truly blessed attitude. But it must be a reality. It will not do to talk of being **“poor and contrite,”** we must be in the condition. It is an individual matter. **“To this man will I look.”**

Oh may the Lord, in His infinite mercy, lead us, everyone, into true self-judgment, under the action of His Word. May our ears be open to hear His voice. May there be a real turning of our hearts to Himself and to His Word. May we turn our backs, in holy decision, once and forever, upon everything that will not stand the test of Scripture. This, we are persuaded, is what our Lord Christ looks for on the part of all who belong to Him, amid the terrible and hopeless debris of Christendom.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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