

CHAPTER 5

CAUTION TO AN ANXIOUS SINNER

To conclude. Notwithstanding all that hath or can be said, there are six things that have great power with the heart to bend it to seek life before God by the law; of all which I would caution that soul to beware that would have happiness in another world.

First, Take heed thou be not made to seek to the law for life, because of that name and majesty of God which thou findest upon the doctrine of the law, ^{<020>}Exodus 20:1. God indeed spake all the words of the law, and delivered them in that dread and majesty to men that shook the hearts of all that heard it. Now this is of great authority with some, even to seek for life and bliss by the law: “We know,” said some, “that God spake to Moses,” ^{<028>}John 9:28, 29. And Saul rejected Christ even of zeal towards God, ^{<023>}Acts 22:3. What zeal? Zeal towards God according to the law, which afterwards he left and rejected, because he had found out a better way, ^{<020>}Galatians 2:20. The life that he once lived, it was by the law, but afterwards, saith he, the life that I now live it is by faith, by the faith of Jesus Christ. So that, though the law was the appointment of God, and had also his name and majesty upon it, yet now he will not live by the law. Indeed, God is in the law, but yet only as just and holy, not as gracious and merciful; so he is only in Jesus Christ.

“The law,” the word of justice, “was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ,” ^{<017>}John 1:17.

Wherefore, whatever of God thou findest in the law, yet seeing grace and mercy is not there, let neither the name of God nor that majesty that thou findest of him in the law prevail with thee to seek life by all the holy commands of the law.

Secondly, Take heed that the law, by taking hold on thy conscience, doth not make thee seek life by the law, ^{<013>}Romans 2:13-15. The heart of man is the seat of the law; this being so, the understanding and conscience must

needs be in danger of being bound by the law. Man is a law unto himself, and sheweth that the works of the law are written in his heart. Now the law being thus nearly related to man, it easily takes hold of the understanding and conscience; by which hold, if it be not quickly broken off by the promise and grace of the gospel, it is captivated to the works of the law; for conscience is such a thing, that if it once be possessed with a doctrine, yea, though but with the doctrine of an idol (⁴⁰⁶1 Corinthians 8:6, 7), it will cleave so fast thereto that nothing but a hand from heaven can loosen it; and if it be not loosed, no gospel can be there embraced. Conscience is Little-ease, if men resist it, whether it be rightly or wrongly informed. How fast, then, will it hold when it knows it cleaves to the law of God! Upon this account the condition of the unbeliever is most miserable; for not having faith in the gospel of grace, through which is tendered the forgiveness of sins, they, like men drowning, hold fast that they have found; which being the law of God, they follow it; but because righteousness flies from them, they at last are found only accursed and condemned to hell by the law, ⁴⁰⁷Romans 9:31, 32. Take heed, therefore, that thy conscience be not entangled by the law.

Thirdly, Take heed of fleshly wisdom. Reasoning suiteth much with the law — “I thought verily that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus,” and so to have sought for life by the law; my reason told me so. For thus will reason say: Here is a righteous law, the rule of life and death; besides, what can be better than to love God, and my neighbor as myself? Again; God hath thus commanded, and his commands are just and good; therefore, doubtless, life must come by the law. Further, to love God and keep the law are better than to sin and break it; and seeing men lost heaven by sin, how should they get it again but by working righteousness? Besides, God is righteous, and will therefore bless the righteous. Oh, the holiness of the law! It mightily swayeth with reason when a man addicteth himself to religion; the light of nature teacheth that sin is not the way to heaven; and seeing no word doth more condemn sin than the words of the ten commandments, it must needs be therefore the most perfect rule for holiness; wherefore, saith reason, the safest way to life and glory is to keep myself close to the law. But a little here to correct. Though the law indeed be holy, yet the mistake as to the matter in hand is as wide as the east from the west; for therefore the law can do thee no good, because it is

holy and just; for what can he that hath sinned expect from a law that is holy and just? Nought but condemnation. Let them lean to it while they will,

“there is one that accuseth you,” saith Christ, “even Moses in whom you trust,” ⁴¹⁵⁵John 5:45.

Fourthly, Man’s ignorance of the gospel suiteth well with the doctrine of the law; they, through their being ignorant of God’s righteousness, fall in love with that, ⁴⁵⁰⁰Romans 10:1-4. Yea, they do not only suit, but, when joined in act, the one strengtheneth the other — that is, the law strengtheneth our blindness, and bindeth the veil more fast about the face of our souls. The law suiteth much our blindness of mind,

“For until this day remains the veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament” (⁴¹⁵⁵2 Corinthians 3:15, 16),

especially in the reading of that which was written and engraven on stones — to wit, the ten commandments, that perfect rule for holiness — which veil is done away in Christ. But “even to this day, when Moses is read, the veil is over their hearts;” they are blinded by the duties enjoined by the law from the sight and hopes of forgiveness of sins by grace — “Nevertheless when it (the heart) shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.” The law, then, doth veil the heart from Christ, and holds the man so down to doing and working for the kingdom of heaven, that he quite forgets the forgiveness of sins by mercy through Christ. Now this veiling or blinding by the law is occasioned,

1. By reason of the contrariety of doctrine that is in the law to that which was in the gospel. The law requireth obedience to all its demands upon pain of everlasting burning; the gospel promiseth forgiveness of sins to him that worketh not, but believeth. Now the heart cannot receive both these doctrines; it must either let go doing or believing. If it believe, it is dead to doing; if it be set to doing for life, it is dead to believing. Besides, he that shall think both to do and believe for justification before God from the curse, he seeks for life but as it were by the law, he seeks for life but as it were by Christ; and he being not direct in either, shall for certain be forsaken of both. Wherefore?

“Because he seeks it not by faith,
but as it were by the works of the law,” ^{<4812>}Romans 9:32.

2. The law veils and blinds by that guilt and horror for sin that seizeth the soul by the law; for guilt, when charged close upon the conscience, is attended with such aggravations, and that with such power and evidence, that the conscience cannot hear, nor see, nor feel anything else but that. When David’s guilt for murder and blood did roar by the law in his conscience, notwithstanding he knew much of the grace of the gospel, he could hear nothing else but terror, the sound of blood; the murder of Uriah was the only noise that he heard; wherefore he crieth to God that he would *make* him hear the gospel:

“Make me to hear joy and gladness,
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice,” ^{<4508>}Psalms 51:8.

And as he could not *hear*, so neither could he *see*; the law had struck him deaf and blind: “I am (saith he) not able to look up;” not up to Christ for mercy. As if David had said, O Lord, the guilt of sin, which is by the law, makes such a noise and horror in my conscience, that I can neither hear nor see the word of peace, unless it is spoken with a voice from heaven! The serpents that bit the people in the days of old were types of guilt and sin, ^{<4206>}Numbers 21:6. Now these were fiery serpents, and such as, I think, could fly, ^{<2442>}Isaiah 14:29; wherefore, in my judgment, they stung the people about their faces, and so swelled up their eyes, which made it the more difficult for them to look up to the brazen serpent, which was the type of Christ, ^{<4814>}John 3:14. Just so doth sin by the law do now; it stings the soul, the very face of the soul, which is the cause that looking up to Jesus, or believing in him, is so difficult a task in time of terror of conscience.

3. This is not only so at present, but so long as guilt is on the conscience, so long remains the blindness; for guilt standing before the soul, the grace of God is intercepted, even as the sun is hid from the sight of mine eyes by the cloud that cometh between: “My sin,” said David, “is ever before me” (^{<4503>}Psalms 51:3), and so kept other things out of his sight: sin, I say, when applied by the law. When the law came to Paul, he remained without sight (Acts 9.) until the good man came unto him with the word of forgiveness of sins.

4. Again; where the law comes with power, there it begetteth many doubts against the grace of God; for it is only a revealer of sin, and the ministration of death; that is, a doctrine that sheweth sin, and condemneth for the same; hence, therefore, as was hinted before, the law being the revealer of sin, where that is embraced, there sin must needs be discovered and condemned, and the soul for the sake of that; further, it is not only a revealer of sin, but that which makes it abound; so that the closer any man sticks to the law for life, the faster sin doth cleave to him. “That law,” saith Paul, “which was ordained to be unto life, I found to be unto death” (⁴⁵⁷¹Romans 7:10-14); for by the law I became a notorious sinner; I thought to have obtained life by obeying the law, “but sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and thereby slew me.” A strange way of deceivableness, and it is hid from the most of men; but, as I have already told you, you see how it comes to pass.

1. Man by nature is carnal, and the law itself is spiritual: now betwixt these two ariseth great difference; the law is exceeding good, the heart exceeding bad; these two opposites therefore (the heart so abiding) can by no means agree.

2. Therefore, at every approach of the law to the heart with intent to impose duty, or to condemn for the neglect thereof; at every such approach the heart starteth back, especially when the law comes home indeed, and is heard in his own language. This being thus, the conscience perceiving this is a fault, begins to tremble at the sense of judgment; the law still continueth to command to duty, and to condemn for the neglect thereof. From this struggling of these two opposites ariseth, I say, those doubts and fears that drive the heart into unbelief, and that make it blind to the word of the gospel, that it can neither see nor understand anything but that it is a sinner, and that the law must be fulfilled by it if ever it be saved.

Fifthly. But again; another thing that hath great influence upon the heart to make it lean to the law for life is, the false names that Satan and his instruments have put upon it; such as these — to call the law the gospel; conscience, the spirit of Christ; works, faith; and the like: with these, weak consciences have been mightily pestered; yea, thousands deluded and destroyed. This was the way whereby the enemy attempted to overthrow

the church of Christ of old; as, namely, those in Galatia and at Corinth, etc., ^(410B)2 Corinthians 11:3, 4, 13, 14. I say, by the feigned notion that the law was the gospel, the Galatians were removed from the gospel of Christ; and Satan, by appropriating to himself and his ministers the names and titles of the ministers of the Lord Jesus, prevailed with many at Corinth to forsake Paul and his doctrine. Where the Lord Jesus hath been preached in truth, and something of his doctrine known, it is not there so easy to turn people aside from the sound of the promise of grace, unless it be by the noise and sound of *a* gospel. Therefore, I say, the false apostles came thus among the churches: “another gospel, another gospel;” which, in truth, saith Paul, “is not another; but some would pervert the gospel of Christ” (^(410C)Galatians 1:6-8), and thrust that out of doors, by gilding the law with that glorious name. So again, for the ministers of Satan, they must be called the apostles of Christ and ministers of righteousness which thing, I say, is of great force, especially being accompanied with so holy and just a doctrine as the word of the law is; for what better to the eye of reason than to love God above all, and our neighbor as ourselves, which doctrine, being the scope of the ten words given on Sinai, no man can contradict; for, in truth, they are holy and good. But here is the poison; to set this law in the room of a mediator, as those do that seek to stand just before God thereby; and then nothing is so dishonorable to Christ, nor of so soul-destroying a nature as the law; for that thus placed hath not only power when souls are deluded, but power to delude, by its real holiness, the understanding, conscience, and reason of a man; and by giving the soul a semblance of heaven, to cause it to throw away Christ, grace, and faith. Wherefore it behoveth all men to take heed of names, and of appearances of holiness and goodness.

Lastly, Satan will yet go further; he will make use of something that may be at a distance from a moral precept, and therewith bring souls under the law. Thus he did with some of old; he did not make the Galatians fall from Christ by virtue of one of the ten words, but by something that was aloof off; by circumcision, days and months, that were Levitical ceremonies; for he knows it is no matter, nor in what Testament he found it, if he can therewith hide Christ from the soul —

“Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing; for I testify again to every man that is

circumcised, that he is a debtor to the whole law,”
~~AND~~ Galatians 5:2, 3.

Why so, seeing circumcision is not one of the ten words? Why, because they did it in conscience to God, to stand just before him thereby. Now here we may behold much cunning of the devil; he begins with some at a distance from that law which curseth, and so by little and little bringeth them under it; even as by circumcision the Galatians were at length brought under the law that condemneth all men to the wrath and judgment of God. I have often wondered when I have read how God crieth out against the Jews for observing his own commandment (Isaiah 1); but I perceive by Paul that by these things a man may reject and condemn the Lord Jesus; which those do that for life set up aught, whether moral or other institution, besides the faith of Jesus.

Let men therefore warily distinguish betwixt names and things, betwixt statute and commandment, lest they by doing the one transgress against the other, ~~AND~~ 2 Corinthians 1:19, 20. Study, therefore, the nature and end of the law with the nature and end of the gospel; and if thou canst keep them distinct in thy understanding and conscience, neither names nor things, neither statutes nor commandments, can draw thee from the faith of the gospel.