

THE EPISTLE TO THE READER

READER,

IF at any time there be held forth by the preacher the freeness and fullness of the Gospel, together with the readiness of the Lord of Peace to receive those that have any desire thereto, presently it is the spirit of the world to cry out, Sure this man disdains the law, slights the law, and counts that of none effect; and all because there is not, together with the Gospel, mingled the doctrine of the law, which is not a right dispensing of the Word according to truth and knowledge. Again; if there be the terror, horror, and severity of the law discovered to a people by the servants of Jesus Christ, though they do not speak of it to the end people should trust to it, by relying on it as it is a covenant of works; but rather that they should be driven further from that covenant, even to embrace the tenders and privileges of the second, yet, poor souls, because they are unacquainted with the natures of these two covenants, or either of them, therefore, “they say,” “Here is nothing but preaching of the law, thundering of the law;” when, alas, if these two be not held forth — to wit, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, together with the nature of the one and the nature of the other — souls will never be able either to know what they are by nature or what they lie under. Also, neither can they understand what grace is, nor how to come from under the law to meet God in and through that other most glorious covenant, through which and only through which, God can communicate of Himself grace, glory, yea, even all the good things of another world.

I, having considered these things, together with others, have made bold to present yet once more to thy view, my friend, something of the mind of God, to the end, if it shall be but blessed to thee, thou mayest be benefited thereby; for verily these things are not such as are ordinary and of small concernment, but do absolutely concern thee to know, and that experimentally too, if ever thou do partake of the glory of God through Jesus Christ, and so escape the terror and insupportable vengeance that will otherwise come upon thee through His justice, because of thy living and dying in thy transgressions against the Law of God. And therefore, while thou livest here below, it is thy duty, if thou wish thyself happy for

the time to come, to give up thyself to the studying of these two covenants treated of in the ensuing discourse; and so to study them until thou, through grace, do not only get the notion of the one and of the other in thy head, but until thou do feel the very power, life, and glory of the one and of the other: for take this for granted, he that is dark as touching the scope, intent, and nature of the law, is also dark as to the scope, nature, and glory of the Gospel; and also he that hath but a notion of the one, will barely have any more than a notion of the other.

And the reason is this: because so long as people are ignorant of the nature of the law, and of their being under it — that is, under the curse and condemning power of it, by reason of their sin against it — so long they will be careless, and negligent as to the inquiring after the true knowledge of the Gospel. Before the commandment came — that is, in the spirituality of it — Paul was alive — that is, thought himself safe; which is clear, (~~SUB~~Romans 7:9, 10 compared with ~~SUB~~Philippians 3:5-11, etc). But when that came, and was indeed discovered unto him by the Spirit of the Lord, then Paul dies (~~SUB~~Romans 7) to all his former life (~~SUB~~Philippians 3) and that man which before could content himself to live, though ignorant of the Gospel, cries out now,

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of
Christ Jesus my Lord” (~~SUB~~Philippians 3:8).

Therefore, I say, so long they will be ignorant of the nature of the Gospel, and how glorious a thing it is to be found within the bounds of it; for we use to say, that man that knoweth not himself to be sick, that man will not look out for himself a physician; and this Christ knew full well when He saith, “The whole have no need of the physician, but the sick;” ^{fa1} that is, none will in truth desire the physician unless they know they be sick. That man also that hath got but a notion of the law — a notion, that is, the knowledge of it in the head, so as to discourse and talk of it — if he hath not felt the power of it, and that effectually too, it is to be feared will at the best be but a notionist in the Gospel; he will not have the experimental knowledge of the same in his heart; nay, he will not seek nor heartily desire after it; and all because, as I said before, he hath not experience of the wounding, cutting, killing nature of the other.

I say, therefore, if thou wouldst know the authority and power of the Gospel, Labor first to know the power and authority of the law; for I am verily persuaded that the want of this one thing — namely, the knowledge of the law, is one cause why so many are ignorant of the other. That man that doth know the law doth not know in deed and in truth that he is a sinner; and that man that doth not know he is a sinner, doth not know savingly that there is a Savior.

Again; that man that doth not know the nature of the law, that man doth not know the nature of sin; and that man that knoweth not the nature of sin, will not regard to know the nature of a Savior; this is proved (⁴⁰³John 8:31-36). These people were professors, and yet did not know the truth — the Gospel; and the reason was, because they did not know themselves, and so not the law. I would not have thee mistake me, Christian reader; I do not say that the law of itself will lead any soul to Jesus Christ; but the soul being killed by the law, through the operation of its severity seizing on the soul, then the man, if he be enlightened by the Spirit of Christ to see where remedy is to be had, will not, through grace, be contented without the real and saving knowledge through faith of Him.

If thou wouldst, then, wash thy face clean, first take a glass and see where it is dirty; that is, if thou wouldst indeed have thy sins washed away by the blood of Christ, Labor first to see them in the glass of the law, and do not be afraid to see thy besmeared condition, but look on every spot thou hast; for he that looks on the foulness of his face by the halves, will wash by the halves; even so, he that looks on his sins by the halves, he will seek for Christ by the halves. Reckon thyself, therefore, I say, the biggest sinner in the world, and be persuaded that there is none worse than thyself; then let the guilt of it seize on thy heart, then also go in that case and condition to Jesus Christ, and plunge thyself into His merits and the virtue of His blood; and after that, thou shalt speak of the things of the law and of the Gospel experimentally, and the very language of the children of God shall feelingly drop from thy lips, and not till then (⁵⁰⁰James 1).

Let this therefore learn thee thus much: he that hath not seen his lost condition hath not seen a safe condition; he that did never see himself in the devil's snare, did never see himself in Christ's bosom. "This my Son

was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found.” “Among whom we also had our conversation in time past.” ^{F2} “But now are (so many of us as believe) returned unto” Jesus Christ, “the” chief “Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

I say, therefore, if thou do find in this treatise, in the first place, something touching the nature, end, and extent of the law, do not thou cry out, therefore, all of a sudden, saying, “Here is nothing but the terror, horror, and thundering sentences of the law.”

Again; if thou do find in the second part of this discourse something of the freeness and fullness of the Gospel, do not thou say neither, “Here is nothing but grace, therefore, surely, an undervaluing of the law.” No; but read it quite through, and so consider of it; and I hope thou shalt find the two covenants — which all men are under, either the one or the other — discovered, and held forth in their natures, ends, bounds, together with the state and condition of them that are under the one, and of them that are under the other.

There be some that through ignorance do say how that such men as preach terror and amazement to sinners are beside the book, and are ministers of the letter — the law, and not of the Spirit — the Gospel; but I would answer them, citing them to the Sixteenth of Luke, from the nineteenth verse to the end; and (~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; ~~Galatians~~ Galatians 3:10; ~~Romans~~ Romans 3:9-19) only this caution I would give by the way, how that they which preach terror to drive souls to the obtaining of salvation by the works of the law, that preaching is not the right Gospel preaching; yet when saints speak of the sad state that man are in by nature, to discover to souls their need of the Gospel, this is honest preaching, and he that doth do so, he doth the work of a Gospel minister (~~Romans~~ Romans 3:9-25).

Again, there are others that say, because we do preach the free, full, and exceeding grace discovered in the Gospel, therefore we make void the law; when indeed, unless the Gospel be held forth in the glory thereof without confusion, by mingling the Covenant of Works therewith, the law cannot be established. “Do we then make void the law through faith,” or preaching of the Gospel; nay, stay, saith Paul, “God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (~~Romans~~ Romans 3:31). And verily, he that will indeed establish the law, or set it in its own place, for so I understand the words,

must be sure to hold forth the Gospel in its right color and nature; for if a man be ignorant of the nature of the Gospel and the Covenant of Grace, they, or he, will be very apt to remove the law out of its place, and that because they are ignorant, not knowing “what they say, nor whereof they affirm.”

And let me tell you, if a man be ignorant of the Covenant of Grace, and the bounds and boundlessness of the Gospel, though he speak and make mention of the name of the Father, and of the Son, and also of the name of the new covenant, and the blood of Christ, yet at this very time, and in these very words, he will preach nothing but the law, and that as a Covenant of Works.

Reader, I must confess it is a wonderfully mysterious thing, and he had need have a wiser spirit than his own that can rightly set these two covenants in their right places, that when he speaks of the one he doth not jostle the other out of its place. O, to be so well enlightened as to speak of the one — that is, the law — for to magnify the Gospel; and also to speak of the Gospel so as to establish, and yet not to idolize, the law, nor any particular thereof! It is rare, and to be heard and found but in very few men’s breasts. If thou shouldst say, What is it to speak to each of these two covenants so as to set them in their right places, and also to use the terror of the one so as to magnify and advance the glory of the other? To this I shall answer also, read the ensuing discourse, but with an understanding heart, and it is like thou wilt find a reply therein to the same purpose, which may be to thy satisfaction.

Reader, if thou do find this book empty of fantastical expressions, and without light, vain, whimsical, scholar-like terms, thou must understand it is because I never went to school to Aristotle, or Plato, but was brought up at my father’s house, in a very mean condition, among a company of poor countrymen. But if thou do find a parcel of plain, yet sound, true, and home sayings, attribute that to the Lord Jesus His gifts and abilities, which He hath bestowed upon such a poor creature as I am and have been. And if thou, being a seeing Christian, dost find me coming short, though rightly touching at some things, attribute that either to my brevity, or, if thou wilt, to my weaknesses, for I am full of them. A word or two more, and so I shall have done with this.

First. And the first is, Friend, if thou do not desire the salvation of thy soul, yet I pray thee to read this book over with serious consideration; it may be it will stir up in thee some desires to look out after it, which at present thou mayest be without.

Secondly, If thou dost find any stirrings in thy heart by thy reading such an unworthy man's works as mine are, be sure that in the first place thou give glory to God, and give way to thy convictions, and be not too hasty in getting them off from thy conscience; but let them so work till thou dost see thyself by nature void of all graces, as faith, hope, knowledge of God, Christ, and the Covenant of Grace.

Thirdly, Then, in the next place, fly in all haste to Jesus Christ, thou being sensible of thy lost condition without Him, secretly persuading of thy soul that Jesus Christ standeth open-armed to receive thee, to wash away thy sins, to clothe thee with His righteousness, and is willing, yea, heartily willing, to present thee before the presence of the glory of God and among the innumerable company of angels with exceeding joy. This being thus, in the next place, do not satisfy thyself with these secret and first persuasions, which do or may encourage thee to come to Jesus Christ; but be restless till thou dost find by blessed experience the glorious glory of this the second covenant extended unto thee, and sealed upon thy soul with the very Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that thou mayest not slight this my counsel, I beseech thee, in the second place, consider these following things —

First, If thou dost get off thy convictions, and not the right way (which is by seeing thy sins washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ), it is a question whether ever God will knock at thy heart again or no; but rather say, such an one "is joined to idols, let him alone" (²⁰¹⁷Hosea 4:17). Though he be in a natural state, "*let him alone.*" Though he be in or under the curse of the law, "*let him alone.*" Though he be in the very hand of the devil, "*let him alone.*" Though he be a-going post-haste to Hell, "*let him alone.*" Though his damnation will not only be damnation for sins against the law, but also for slighting the Gospel, yet "*let him alone.*" My Spirit, My ministers, My Word, My grace, My mercy, My love, My pity, My common providence's, shall no more strive with him; "*let him alone.*" O

sad! O miserable! who would slight convictions that are on their souls, which (if not slighted) tend so much for their good?

Secondly, If thou shalt not regard how thou do put off convictions, but put them off without the precious blood of Christ being savingly applied to thy soul, thou art sure to have the mis-spending of that conviction to prove the hardening of thy heart against the next time thou art to hear the Word preached or read. This is commonly seen, that those souls that have not regarded those convictions that are at first set upon their spirits, do commonly, and that by the just judgments of God upon them, grow more hard, more senseless, more seared and sottish in their spirits; for some, who formerly would quake and weep, and relent under the hearing of the Word, do now for the present sit so senseless, so seared, and hardened in their consciences, that certainly if they should have hell-fire thrown in their faces, as it sometimes cried up in their ears, they would scarce be moved; and this comes upon them as a just judgment of God (Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

Thirdly, If thou do slight these, or those convictions that may be set upon thy heart by reading of this discourse, or hearing of any other good man preach the Word of God sincerely, thou wilt have the stifling of these or those convictions to account and answer for at the day of judgment; not only thy sins, that are commonly committed by thee in thy calling and common discourse, but thou shalt be called to a reckoning for slighting convictions, disregarding of convictions, which God useth as a special means to make poor sinners see their lost condition and the need of a Savior. Now here I might add many more considerations besides these, to the end thou mayest be willing to tend and listen to convictions; as,

First, Consider thou hast a precious soul, more worth than the whole world; and this is commonly worked upon, if ever it be saved, by convictions.

Secondly, This soul is for certain to go to Hell, if thou shalt be a sligher of convictions.

Thirdly, If that go to Hell, thy body must go thither too, and then never to come out again. “Now consider this, ye that” are apt to “forget God,” and

His convictions, “lest He tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver” (¹⁸¹²Psalm 50:22).

But if thou shalt be such an one that shall, notwithstanding thy reading of thy misery, and also of God’s mercy, shall persist to go on in thy sins, know, in the first place, that here thou shalt be left, by the things that thou readest, without excuse; and in the world to come thy damnation will be exceedingly aggravated for thy not regarding of them, and turning from thy sins, which were not only reprov’d by them, but also for rejecting of that Word of Grace that did instruct thee how and which way thou shouldst be saved from them. And so farewell; I shall leave thee, and also this discourse, to God, who I know will pass a righteous judgment both upon that and thee. I am yours, though not to serve your lusts and filthy minds, yet to reprove, instruct, and, according to that proportion of faith and knowledge which God hath given me, to declare unto you the way of life and salvation. Your judgings, railings, surmisings, and disdainings of me, that I shall leave till the fiery judgment comes, in which the offender shall not go unpunished, be he you or me; yet I shall pray for you, wish well to you, and do you what good I can. And that I might not write or speak in vain, Christian, pray for me to our God with much earnestness, fervency, and frequently, in all your knockings at our Father’s door, because I do very much stand in need thereof; for my work is great, my heart is vile, the devil lieth at watch, the world would fain be saying, “Aha, aha, thus we would have it;” and of myself, keep myself I cannot; trust myself I dare not; if God do not help me, I am sure it will not be long before my heart deceive me, and the world would have their advantage of me, and so God be dishonored by me, and thou also ashamed to own me. O, therefore, be much in prayer for me, thy fellow! I trust, in that glorious grace that is conveyed from Heaven to sinners, by which they are not only sanctified here in this world, but shall be glorified in that which is to come; unto which, the Lord of His mercy bring us all.

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