

DISCOURSES

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DISCOURSE II.

THE LAW OF GOD.

ROM. vii. 12.—“ Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”

THE seventh chapter of Romans is a compendium of experimental theology. It is a proper standard of that kind of religious experience which alone is enlightened, genuine, and everlasting. It remains an inspired protest against extravagance, airy conceits, presumptuous hopes, lawless fervours, spurious joys, unholy satisfactions, and heartless forms in religion. Against ignorance, presumption, pretension with no experience, and affections not “the fruit of the Spirit,” its total testimony is lifted; and those only, whose piety is acquitted by this criterion, “shall be able to stand” the fiery ordeal of eternity. The exercises it describes are certainly gracious: but they are initial, and respect mainly

the discoveries, feelings, and desires, of a soul in the process of introduction to the spiritualities of religion; commencing with his previous state, advancing with his progress, and rejoicing in his consummated attachment to the Redeemer. That soul is doubtless the Apostle himself. Paul is not more the historian, than the theme, of the lucid narrative. The experiences of such a noble of the christian empire may well be given by the Great King of Saints, for the direction and the assurance of his inferior subjects.

In this narration it is remarkable how much is said of the law of God. Its use and ministry are indicated, its connection with the gospel seen, and its distinctness fully manifested. The law of God is evidently the foundation of all the experiences recorded in this wonderful chapter: and since the nature of mind, of depravity, and of religion, remains the same in all ages, we may safely extend the proposition—it is the basis of all genuine religion.

With such views of the law of God, it is not wonderful, my brethren, that we have given it an early place in these lectures; since this may be fairly denominated a criterion-subject, influencing essentially the total system of our religious belief. I solicit your candid and patient attention then to the following questions:

What is the law of God?

What right has God to impose his law upon us?

Why did he impose such a law?

What concern have we with his law, since to be saved by it is impossible?

What are the attributes of excellence that commend the law of God to the approbation and affection of all his moral subjects?

After answering these questions, respecting *the nature and relations of the law of God*, we shall mention *some lessons of wisdom thence deducible—some, instead of many, thence resulting.*

I. WHAT IS THE LAW OF GOD?

A law, in its most general sense, is a rule of action. Its object is to regulate personal conduct. The laws of nature and of matter, in all their various forms, are but the code of order which Jehovah hath legislated for himself, and of which he is at once the maker and the subject, the enactor and the executive, in the administration of infinite providence. To speak of these laws as if they were their own authors, or as if they were themselves conscious agents, or as if they were sovereign efficient in the system of things, like the kindred anomaly that defies *nature*, involves such dark absurdity, to say nothing of its atheism, as would disgrace the mind of a sensible pagan. What then are we to think of nominal christians who habituate the phraseology? Certainly that they are “wilfully ignorant” of that glorious Intelligence

who, retired

Behind his own creation, works unseen

By the impure, and hears his power denied.

But we are treating now of the moral universe; the illimitable empire of mind; the circle of wonders and of glories within which expatiate the numerous orders of accountable and immortal creatures. Matter was made for mind; and the laws of the former are all subservient to the interests of the intellectual department of existence. The one is transient and tributary; the other permanent and ultimate. The material universe, with all its gorgeous scenery and astounding complications of mechanism, is inferior—infinately inferior to those eternal agents, and qualities, and relations, for which it was made and to which it ministers; while it may be regarded as the mere staging on which the mighty drama is displayed. How important and how grand is theological science!

The law of God may be defined—*that eternal rule which he has prescribed for the government of minds; commanding what is right, prohibiting what is wrong, and with appropriate sanctions supporting the universal interests of order, holiness, and happiness.* It has a precept and a penalty; an object and a perfect adaptation to its end. It includes all angels, all devils, and all men, in its perfect jurisdiction. Penalty is essential to its being, as law; without which indeed it might embody much good counsel, advice, and even entreaty; it might advertise possibly the amiable weakness and the pitiable confusion of the Lawgiver; but his authority, his majesty, his independence, and his glory, it never could achieve. In

short, it could be no law, without an adequate penalty, determinately made, fully propounded, and forever sustained. That penalty is specifically given in the scriptures. It is there called "death;" and this—though not alone—is perhaps its most frequent appellation. Natural death, as we commonly speak, though one of the consequences of sin in this mixed probationary system, is—we are prepared to prove—no part of the proper penalty of the law. It is none: unless every other misery, such for example as the curse of toil; the pains and subjected condition of "the suffering sex;" the thorns, thistles, and noxious herbage with which the earth is overgrown; and the hostile revolt of all the irrational tribes against the lordship and the felicity of man—unless all these, with every pang we feel and every tear we shed, are proper original constituents of penalty. That all misery is a monster in the dominions of God, and that sin has in some way introduced it all, are true and safe positions. But it is quite another matter to aver that all the "variety of wretchedness" we suffer is but the formal developement of penalty strictly legal. We are not now speaking of the gospel; of the system of grace; of mediatorial constitution and government; and of evils that exist generally in those abodes of mortality to which we appertain: but of the law of God, which, however connected with our present condition, has a nature and a character of its own, and must be viewed as it is in order to understand its influence upon other things that are.

Death is the image of accomplished ruin, of desolation and despair. One sin entails this penalty on every offender. It is the curse of God. It is seen in what is certainly revealed of primitive transgressors, the original seniors of disobedience, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell." It is called "everlasting punishment"—and "everlasting fire" which was "prepared for the devil and his angels."

It is legal or judicial death; and unless, in human instances, its sentence is repealed through the mediatorial economy, it is finally executed on all the impenitent, who "depart" from Christ, accursed, into the eternal misery which angel apostates first incurred. Much darkness hath been induced from literalizing the word "death." In the original threatening to the progenitors of mankind, it is not literal but judicial death that is respected. The same is demonstrably true in the Epistle to the Romans throughout. Thus, when it is said, "death reigned from Adam to Moses—many be dead—sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned—the wages of sin is death—if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die—to be carnally minded is death," and so onward, literal death is not meant; neither spiritual death, which is but a figurative phrase for total sinfulness; but judicial death, or death in the eye of law, condemnation, ill-desert, exposure to wrath. Judicial death becomes by protraction eternal death; and this in every instance known to us, except where the

grace of the gospel is secured to christians. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse—that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident—being justified freely, by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed—he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses—how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation—every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward."

But if the law is thus armed with a fearful penalty, adequate to the interests it guards, the wrong it avenges, and the good it intends, so has it primarily a most excellent precept. Without this also it could not be law; though it might be cruelty, caprice, and the purest folly imaginable. It requires love; supreme to God, equal and impartial to our fellows, perfect in degree, holy in nature, and perpetual in exercise.

The law is substantially and unchangeably what it has now been described. Toward us however its forms vary. The whole written word of God is often denominated his law. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. They that forsake the law praise the wicked; but such as keep the law contend with them." The law is often identified with the decalogue or ten commandments. Its

whole substance has been condensed still more by the Saviour, who comprizes the whole in two great precepts, on which, he declares, "hang all the law and the prophets." The apostle tells us that it "is spiritual;" in which he seems to condense it to its utmost, as it were a flame of ethereal purity, radiating from the throne of God, and exacting a corresponding purity and perfection of all the moral offspring of the Lord God Almighty.

What a jurisdiction is this! the only perfect one in existence. Other laws regulate appearances, manners, and the exterior alone; this affects the soul, inspires sincerity, proscribes "the thought of foolishness," and enjoins a spotless and durable obedience. It subjects absolutely every mind, holy or unholy, in the moral dominions of God, to its authority, if not to its obedience. Hence it occurs to consider the question,

II. WHAT RIGHT HAS GOD TO IMPOSE HIS LAW UPON US?

This question is often asked, and very often entertained in thought. It admits the fact that God hath done it; and seems further to admit also that he had a right to do it. But wherein does that right consist, on what is it founded, and can it be vindicated? The spirits of piety, who know God, have a way of resolving all such questions. They argue with ease, and often with infallibility, from the perfections of Jehovah. "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?"

for thou only art holy." This position is not more comprehensive than safe. It may be trusted forever and applied universally. It is as certain as the infinite excellency of God ; from which it is a plain and philosophical deduction. Still, in the present instance, it is not sufficiently specific. It does not assign the particular star, in the glorious constellation, upon which depends the identical right of the Lawgiver, to throw his perfect jurisdiction over all minds, holy or unholy, willing or unwilling, and put them all under a positive responsibility which they can neither modify nor avoid.

Besides, the perfections of God, though they constitute a perfect demonstration that whatever he does is right, are, we affirm, no foundation of his right of legislation. We rejoice to know of one king, to whose administration it is no vainglorious compliment, but a maxim of simple verity, to say that *the King can do no wrong*. But does this truth constitute his title to reign ? How is it in political society ? May a citizen dictate laws to the commonwealth, merely because he may be a competent jurist, a deserving and benevolent character ? Not at all. He must be legitimately installed. A relation, involving his right to legislate, must first be constituted ; and from that relation flows the prerogative. Many an incompetent man sustains the relation ; many a worthless incumbent occupies a seat of high constitutional authority ; and many a worthy and qualified individual, as all the world knows, is condemned to a private and powerless station, because

the worthless, the ambitious, the disqualified, can better clamber into place than he and are preferred by the doating multitude. It is not then the wisdom, the goodness, or in any way the infinite perfection of God, that founds his right as moral governor: not any or all of his essential attributes, not his glorious and perfect nature; but the relations he sustains to his own moral creatures. He is their Maker, Owner, Ruler, Judge, and King; and by necessary and indestructible right, founded in these relations to his own, he may come, as he does, to each of them, with language as imperative as this: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy powers; Thou shalt love thy fellow as thyself; and this, all this, perfectly and perpetually, on pain of my judicial and visited displeasure." This is what he does, and has a right to do. Thus, in the preface to the decalogue, he first installs himself in the legislative relation; saying, "I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage:" then his mandates are uttered, and Israel acknowledges the Sovereign of worlds; saying, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me;" and so of the others. But for this relation, he could have no right to impose even the ten commandments, or any one of them, notwithstanding their intrinsic excellency. Otherwise, a mere mortal, as Moses, might impose such laws, if he could make them; and then they would possess a kind of authority too refined, impalpable, and baseless, to compel the assent or convince the understand-

ing of man or angel. In this case, they would lose their appropriate character. They would cease to be law; though they might pass for excellent suggestions, friendly hints, fine maxims, and rules of pure or possible expediency. Such a debilitated code, such sanctionless and contemptible statutes, mandatory in form but merely suasory in fact, would operate only as a solvent to virtue, a premium to vice, and a facility to licentiousness. But who is God? and who are his creatures? Are not we dependent on him, absolutely, perpetually, universally? Dependent for existence, for all our proper attributes, for prosperity and happiness? This accords with the moral sense of angels and the common sense of men. Let us illustrate it. Suppose the relations not to exist; and then God comes to us with his law: we reply, "the very challenge of obedience is iniquitous; the very attempt to impose any law on us, without our consent by voluntary compact plighted, is oppressive; we are not thy creatures or thy property, O God; and though it is lawful for any one to do what he will with his own, yet we are our own, not thine; as a Being thou art older, mightier, wiser than we are; but this is no warrant of usurpation on thy part or plea for servility on ours. Might and right are different things, and though we should succumb to superior force we never will consent to tyrannous aggression."

But the relations do exist; and hence how deeply and immoveably are founded the right of the Lawgiver and the duty of the subject! Every mortal feels the

practical influence, in proportion as he apprehends the premises. Let us consider our dependence, and God's relations ; let us fully admit that we are created, appropriated, and subordinate ; and then question, if honestly we can, the right of "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords," to be our Legislator forever. The enemies of God always avoid the premises, just because they can in no other way avoid the conclusion. It may be safely asserted that a rational and moral being, such as man, in proportion as he fully discerns in their proper evidence the existence and relations of his Maker, is mentally and morally necessitated to apprehend also the right of Jehovah to legislate and by consequence his own absolute obligation to obey.

But, it will be asked, may not this right be abused, exercised improperly, and vitiated by iniquity ? Certainly it may. Whether it will or not depends on the character of the Lawgiver. That one possessed of power may administer it amiss, may make unequal, inapposite, or injurious laws, is just as evident as that one, without the power, might make good laws, but could not impose them or constitute them laws at all. Whether God ever does abuse his power as a Lawgiver, has indeed been made a question : and the answers have not only been various, but they have divided the moral universe. One immense party, the incomparable and eternal majority of creatures, have held the negative ; have sincerely maintained the competency of God ; and

even asserted his glory and perfections. The other party—for there are but two—have broached the proud affirmative; have oppugned the rectitude of the laws and his who made them; have pretended virtue in rebellion; have vaunted their own skill, goodness, and desert, as superior to his; have revolted, murmured, hated, and blasphemed; and many have become implacably hostile, malignant, and even eternal, in their deep incurable aversion.

But what is the truth? “Is the law sin?” We may discover in the sequel. It now occurs to consider,

III. WHY DID GOD IMPOSE SUCH A LAW?

This question is capable of great perversion; since it is often asked in a manner vain and vague, as if to solve doubts that have no existence or to remove difficulties that are only verbal or imaginary. In this style it might be asked always, no matter what the name or nature of the law; and then it belongs to the class of “foolish or unlearned questions,” which an Apostle has ordered us to “avoid,” and which unhappily, constitute in some circles the current wisdom, the circulating medium, of misguided and truthless speculation. Alas! that such mortals should be immortal, such reasoners accountable, such philosophers obnoxious to damnation; and yet voluntarily blinded to the infinite glories of truth and righteousness!

But with us the question is serious. Its answer is in order to piety. The more we understand of the ways of God, the better can we worship and the more enjoy.

He also challenges our inspection. "O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? The King's strength also loveth judgment. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious; and his righteousness endureth forever. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever. I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you." Our object is to show the principles of divine legislation; to prove their excellence; and thence to infer the excellency of his law.

Are the relations of right and wrong founded in the nature of things? Is there any thing properly arbitrary in the enactments of God? Is any thing right because he commands it? or does he command it because it is right? What relation has his law to happiness, to order, to reason, to nature, to evidence? Does he care for utility? Does he pursue certain ends, and good ones, in all his legislation? Has he given us such a law, in its spirit and modifications, because his wisdom and goodness approved it as perfect? To all these questions, we reply, There is nothing capricious, passionate, tyrannical, or erring, in our Lawgiver. He is the profoundest Student, I should say Master, of utility, in the universe. To him it appertains to judge, as the infinite Guardian of his own dominions, what is

best. He is the glorious Conservator of happiness in the moral system. To him it seemed necessary to make such a law and to maintain its inviolability. And why may not he do what seems good in his sight, since he alone of beings sees things all just as they are, since to him appearances and realities are the same and nothing appears good but what is good? The nature of things he has indeed constituted; but the criterion of that nature existed eternally in himself and is the congenial offspring of his own glorious perfections: so that right and wrong, as relations, are ultimately resolvable into his own eternal attributes, as like or unlike them. Whatever tends to happiness is right; whatever tends to misery is wrong. Here is the foundation of his law. We may speak of his statutes as moral and positive; and in form or circumstance they may vary so as to warrant the classification. But their nature, whether resulting from the nature of things, or the relations of things, whether general or particular, whether temporary or permanent, whether mysterious or manifest, their nature is one and the same, is excellent alone, is worthy of the incomparable excellence of God. He has made us capable of discerning, as he discerns, the immutable moral difference of right and wrong, of happiness and misery; only that his discernment is perfect, universal, and never impeded or confused. His discernment is eternal intuition, the discernment of Omniscience. But we discern elementarily and in principle the very same opposition of qualities. To

murder, torture, and calumniate another, is wrong because it is contrary to law : but the law has forbidden it because it tends to misery, and because no man would think it right for him to receive such treatment just as it suited the mood of his fellow to dispense it. But laws must be impartial. They must act reciprocally between equals, and warrant or proscribe to each that course of conduct which himself would warrant or proscribe to another. Hence, there is a sense in which every man practically approves the law of God: he judges others in light of its equal principles, and accuses or acquits them just as they are or are not seen to do to others what they would that others should do to them. Here is a moral dilemma out of which for the sinner to extricate himself, if he can. God has so organized his mind that, unless blinded by ignorance of facts or selfishness of principles, he always applies the same criterion of right which God himself applies. "Out of his own mouth" will God condemn him. Were it not for the spirit of perversity, the moral homage of every human being would be directly and ingenuously rendered to the law of God. "They are a law unto themselves;" and must get rid of their moral nature, before they can escape their moral responsibility. The wicked themselves are sometimes acute and accurate casuists. They know very well what a christian ought to be and how he ought to act. They believe in the existence of moral evil, in its odious nature and desert of punishment, when they are the objects of it; and it is only when

they are the subjects of it, that their doubts, and difficulties, and palliatives begin. They acknowledge goodness, when they are made the objects of it, in certain affecting cases, where selfishness has no bribe or place to operate ; and it is only when their own obligations to goodness are pressed, that their cavils and excuses occur to them. Now, of all these facts and developments, millions of them probably in the case of every sinner, will the cause of righteousness be availed in the day of judgment. God will rescue the truth from perversion ; arm every conscience with its “glittering sword ;” vindicate himself to the conviction of the universe ; and confound all hell with the evidence of his rectitude. Meanwhile, the inconceivably vaster multitudes above will be ravished with the spectacle. “And it shall be said in that day, Lo this is our God ; we have waited for him, and he will save us : this is the Lord ; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. O Lord, thou art our God ; we will exalt thee, we will praise thy name ; for thou hast done wonderful things ; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. Alleluia. Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God ; for true and righteous are his judgments. And again they said, Alleluia. And a voice came out from the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thun-

derings, saying Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

I proposed to answer the question.

IV. WHAT CONCERN HAVE WE WITH THE LAW, SINCE TO BE SAVED BY IT IS IMPOSSIBLE?

It is not of the nature of law to show mercy. This pertains, in possible or provided cases, to the sovereignty of the Lawgiver. A law that provides for pardon, provides for its own prostration. It is an ill instrument of order, a worthless guardian of right; in short, its nature is destroyed, and it is law no longer. Hence, law can absolve the innocent alone. Towards the guilty, as the organ of pure justice, "the law worketh wrath" and anticipates nothing but executed penalty. It does not even propose, require, or recognise atonement. This belongs to the supreme arbitration of the Lawgiver. Thus God, when we were all guilty, forecasting our salvation by means that should leave the ermine of his righteousness not only unstained and unsullied, but even brightened in its purity to the vision of his subjects; God, knowing how he could answer and even transcend the ends of punishment in a way of atonement, accepted the costly sacrifice from his own self-immolated Son, that he might magnify his inviolable justice in "a new and living way"—that he "might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

But was it any part of the design of the Saviour's propitiatory death to abolish the law of his Father? or to impair its jurisdiction? or to put the attainder of

cruel on its terrific sanctions? Precisely the opposite of this, was the purpose and the achievement of his expiation. He “magnified the law and made it honourable:” but he also introduced a way of salvation, that was not legal, but evangelical, gracious, and worthy of eternal praise. When, on his account, we are released from the penalty, we are not absolved from the precept, of the law. He has not purchased indulgences for his people, or consecrated transgression, or commanded licentiousness. Consequently, we are eternally obligated to holiness. The gospel is so constituted that its benefits cannot be made ours, without that cordial approbation of the law, which involves essential conformity to its spirit, and which is included in the very nature of obedience to the gospel. Hence our moral concern with the law is inalienable. It instructs us into the nature of duty, sin, ill-desert, spiritual destitution, our need of a Saviour, our awful liabilities, and the absolute necessity of accepting Christ as “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

It appears probable to me that eternal life never could be the entailment or result merely of law. “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man who doeth these things shall live by them;” that is, as long as he does them he shall live, he shall be justified: his obedience and his justification shall parallel each other as far as the former extends. It was so with “the angels that kept not their first estate.” For a season they perfectly obeyed, and they

lived as long. But was this confirmation? was it eternal life? where are they now? God has probably given a probation of perfect obedience to all his moral offspring; and if, according to the conditions constituted, their obedience endured through the allotted period, they were then confirmed in holiness and happiness forever—and this is life eternal. But here it results from covenant, not law. It was not indeed the covenant of grace, nor the probation of grace; it was still a covenant, by sovereign goodness vouchsafed, and appended to law, but of a nature all its own. Law is one thing; covenant is another. God is under no obligations to institute a covenant with one of his moral creatures. To withhold it originally would be no injury. Thus, should he create a moral agent, place him under law, tell him that his justification should always coincide with his obedience, and tell him no more; and should such a subject obey through any given period, and should God then in a moment abstract his being without any pain inflicted and thus annihilate him forever—where would be the injury? Would not perfect equity balance the accounts of both parties? I think it would. True, such a case probably never occurred and may never occur. It is however not the less proper by way of illustration. “An angel from heaven” probably never preached the gospel, and certainly not “an other gospel;” yet the supposition is made by an apostle to illustrate our duty in other cases. Apart from what might be conjectured as to the consequences if our first

parents had retained their integrity in Eden ; and apart from the nature of the national covenant made with the Israelites at Sinai, concerning which opinions vary, I have yet to learn if eternal life is any where represented in scripture as the earnings possibly of human obedience. "For the wages of sin is death : but eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

The law however has its important uses. One of these, it has been already shown, is that it subserves the experience of genuine religion in the soul. It is used by the Spirit in his gracious work of regeneration, sanctification, and even glorification. It teaches us the spirituality of duty, sin, obedience, and requirement. It thus revolutionizes the ancient antinomianism of the soul ; corrects its mistakes ; enlightens, purifies, humbles, and convinces it ; and thus inspires right views of the nature of religion, preparing it for a cordial and an intelligent acceptance of Christ. This was precisely its ministry in the case of the apostle, as recorded in the context. Previous to this process of law-work in his soul, he was a self-glorious Pharisee. His outward character was indeed extraordinary. It was "blameless." His morals were unblemished. His religion was cultivated with great proficiency, and exemplified

with singular consistency, courage, and zeal. Could one mortal of our species have been saved on his own account, and without the grace that is in Christ Jesus, that mortal were Saul of Tarsus. His own correct manner of life was an object of envy or applause to his countrymen, and a subject of congratulation and self-complacency to himself. It constituted his justification created his hope, and sustained his perseverance. It was "life" to him; for, as he says, "I was alive without the law once;" that is, without any just conception of the law, as if it were a body without a soul. So he kept it, and gloried in his own sufficiency. Like a bankrupt merchant, who precludes an examination of his accounts, trades upon his own fancied capital, and feels as solvent as if he owed nothing, and as if his income were affluence. Now, by what means came he to the knowledge of his own deplorable bankruptcy and the ruin of his spiritual affairs? How was he brought to stop payment, to meet his creditors, to surrender all, and to compound with their mercy without the fraction of a farthing in the pound. Answer—through the knowledge of the law, of its spirituality, perfection, eternal excellency, and uncompromising exactitude. Now his righteousness vanished, his hope was extinguished, his sins—like the ghosts of murdered men—rose from the dead to haunt and convulse his bosom, and his anguish of soul was acute and ingenuous as nothing but a corresponding experience can adequately evince. Hear his own account. "For I was

alive without the law once ; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." By what means came this spiritual knowledge of the law to illumine his perceptions ? I answer, by means of a fixed and honest attention, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, to the nature and terms of the law. "What shall we say then ? Is the law sin ? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law : for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." By "the law" he means comprehensively the whole code ; by "the commandment" a single precept, and that the tenth, of the decalogue. But why fix on this ? The answer is— that the tenth is the only one of the ten that is expressly spiritual in its terms : "Thou shalt not covet ;" that is, thou shalt not desire *any* forbidden or unlawful object. The word "lust," as it here occurs, is much more generic and extensive in the original than in our English translation. It is often used in the New Testament in a perfectly general sense, for desire ; sometimes in a good sense for holy desire. Here it means any wayward inclination of the soul towards a forbidden object. His previous views of the law left that fountain of concupiscence unexplored. He was almost or quite unconscious of its existence. He had never brought it into judgment or compared it with that ætherial standard that demands "truth in the inward

parts." Hence he mistook every thing. Like other Jews, his piety expatiated only in the exterior; and here was the cardinal mistake of the nation. On this account they refused a spiritual, and expected a secular, Messiah. But it is a mistake by no means confined to the Jews. It is the sin and misery of human nature. Spirituality marks the boundaries of the kingdom of heaven, including all the spiritual and excluding all the carnal of the species. It is the index and the criterion of true religion, as contradistinguished from fabulous and vain, from imaginings of folly, and doings of self-righteousness. What a transformation is presented in the example of Paul! What a glorious convert! How differently does he speak and act, think and feel, suffer and enjoy, after he came to know and to approve the moral law, that mirror of the divine perfections! "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful"—or, according to the bold personification of the original, "that sin might become an exceeding sinner!" He adds, "For we know that the law is spiritual;" not the tenth commandment only, but the whole law. The jurisdiction of God affects the spirits of men; aims at the soul; demands the heart; and comparatively annihilates all consideration of our moral exterior. And is it wrong in this?

No ! It is holy, just, and good." And, says every true worshipper, "I consent unto the law that it is good. I delight in the law of God, after the inward man. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." It remains to answer the inquiry,

V. WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF EXCELLENCE THAT COMMEND THE LAW OF GOD TO THE APPROBATION AND AFFECTION OF ALL HIS MORAL SUBJECTS ?

Certain it is that God himself loves his law ; that all virtuous beings love it ; and that to love, obey, and exemplify it perfectly will be the eternal history of the ransomed. Without conformity to its excellence and delight in its nature, piety is a delusion, virtue a fiction, and happiness a dream. It is one of the sterling glories of the gospel, that, through the efficacy of faith, it sanctifies, assimilates, and finally perfectionates the christian, according to this eternal standard. There must be some adequate reasons then for this authentic regard to the law of God : and what are they ?

Our text informs us, in three words : "the law is holy, and just, and good." What a eulogium ! Simple, brief, true. How then could it be better ? Who could alter and not injure it ? "The law of the Lord is perfect." Let us contemplate for a moment and

with distinctness, the three characteristic excellencies just recited.

1. The law is *holy*. Holiness in God means, comprehensively, and somewhat abstractly, his perfect moral excellence: in creatures, it means consecration to God or whatever coincides with his moral nature and the ends which he pursues in his moral administration. The law then is holy, because of its moral excellence, its purity, perfection, and unsuffering opposition to sin: and because of its relation to God, as his law, his moral similitude, and the instrument by which his holy reign is manifested and maintained.

2. It is *just*. It is equal, impartial, and exact, in rendering to all their dues. It represents to each, the rights of all; founds duties on rights, and respects not the persons of its subjects. It is just in its demands; for these are always commensurate with the capacity of its subjects, never exacting more at any given moment than what equals the ability of the subject to perform. Its demand is always measured by the powers possessed; otherwise it would plainly be unjust. To exceed ability in the least is as really unrighteous as to exceed it in the greatest. It is this eternal correspondence between ability and obligation that manifests his righteousness, who made the law and who thus appeals to our moral judgment; "are not my ways equal?" Equal they could never be, did he command what we could not perform; did he transcend our capabilities in his requisitions; did he challenge impossibilities of his

creatures on pain of that death which constitutes the penalty of his law, or did he challenge them at all. That he never did such a thing, that he never will do it, that he never could do it, because "he cannot deny himself," are positions to my mind as evident and as important quite as that of his existence. He is perfectly just himself; and his law is but the representative of his nature and the organ of his government. The talents of his servants vary in degree, in nature, and in form; yet, as he dispenses, so he requires of "every man, according to his several ability." The man who has ten talents is obligated on the same principle as he that has five, or two, or one; and that is, to improve what he has, to exercise the powers he possesses, and to do his will "according to the ability which God giveth, that God in all things may be glorified. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that which a man hath and not according to that he hath not." I can scarce conceive of a sentiment more subversive of all righteousness, or more ruinous to the glory of the divine moral government, than that God may demand of us what we have no power to perform. Disinclination may prevent us from obedience; but that will not impair the justice of the requisition, for it implies the possession of adequate ability; and sin does but "commend the righteousness of God," while it challenges from his justice its appropriate recompense.

The law is *just* also in what it inflicts. It is just in its penalty. This position is not disputable, though often disputed. I am willing however to admit that it is, in its manifold relations, the most terrific and trying sentiment of revealed religion. I go further; it is the most terrific and trying sentiment in the universe. I shudder, and tremble, and doubt—and pray, and submit, and believe, whenever I think of it! O that volumed interminable wrath! that dreadful “hell-fire, where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched!” Great and holy Lord God! “who knoweth the power of thine anger?”

That this penalty is just, I said, is an indisputable position. But why indisputable? Christian! whoever you are, why do *you* not dispute it? Shall I tell you? First, because of the clear evidence that God has revealed the fact and decided the question; and second, because you have confidence in his perfections as one who understands himself, who will do right, and who will also vindicate his rectitude hereafter to the conviction of the universe. It is in this confidence that we begin our religion in this world; it is in this confidence that we increase and purify and retain it; and it is in this confidence that we find the balm of holy resignation, and the peace of solid piety, ministering strength and establishment to our souls. Speculation may sometimes assist us; philosophy may look at causes, utilities, and results; vanity may deny our short-sightedness; and “school-taught pride, dissembling all it

can," may profess an exaltation above the necessity of faith in God. After all, piety will recur to first principles; will look at the awfully conclusive evidence of the fact; will rest in the simplicities of revealed statement, and say with confidence and even joy, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." For one, I know of no safe or honourable retreat on this point from "the law and the testimony." Nothing less than the evidence of inspiration should ever conciliate my own faith in the doctrine of eternal punishment. But where that evidence abounds, I compassionate with all my soul the man that asks for more! I fear he will get what he asks; and that God, taking him at his word, will add personal experience to divine testimony; and thus make it credible, to one who thinks it insufficient when alone! nor can I leave this branch of the argument without a word of exhortation. I affectionately beseech you, my beloved hearers, to do "as ye have us for an ensample"—to confide in God fully to explain it, while you cordially admit with Paul the justice of the law! You can never prove the contrary. It may seem hard to you, to whom sin seems innocent. Besides, you are an interested party; you are infinitely interested! And are you sure that sin has never blinded your eyes, or selfishness darkened your judgment, or impenitence destroyed your sympathies with righteousness? This only would I learn of you in the case; Are you a Judge, or a criminal? Is it likely that you are right in contrariety to God? If you were perfectly holy, would you not judge differently? Are you wise to venture

your decision against his who made you? Can you accept grace, while you cavil at justice? Will dissent and murmuring alter the fact, or save one soul, or help you in a possible extremity, or please the Judge Eternal? Surrender then, I implore you; surrender at discretion! Acquiesce; confide; and wait the explanations of eternity. "The obedience of faith," on this article pre-eminently, is exacted of you; and I know of no way, philosophical, devotional, or honest, I repeat it, in which faith may be legitimately superseded or reduced. God knows all things. Immensity; eternity; the manifold interests and relations of all creatures; the sum of blessedness; the utilities of judicial misery; and his own wisdom in the existence, the perpetuity, and the punishment of sin; are understood by him alone: and him you must devoutly honour or impiously arraign; must vindicate or criminate; must glorify or blaspheme. Make then your election. You cannot impeach the law, without condemning the Law-giver: and as to the absurdity which a proud presumption ventures to allege in the premises, remember that the greatest absurdity ever seen in the universe is this—that a mortal man should think himself wiser, better, or more compassionate, than his Maker!

3. The law is *good*. This proposition, taken distinctly, means, I think, that the law tends to happiness; that it loves, promotes, and guaranties the happiness of the universe. The question is not what kind of a system has God created? for this is known. Nor, Had he

a right to create such an one? for this is admitted. These things then being premised, we must admit that the law is good; for the following are all the alternatives of which the case admits, and the only defensible one of these affirms the goodness of the law: namely, either we must have no law in the system; or we must suggest another law that can be shown to be better; or we must have the law that God has actually adopted: and if no better law can be advanced, we must admit not only that it is good, but the best possible. We have two positions to refute, in order to establish the third. And who will affirm that a lawless universe of rational creatures would be an improvement? a universe in which injuries might be given with impunity and suffered without redress! where mischief and misery should be no more forbidden than kindness and beneficence! where malignity would be sinless, slander authorized, and murder uncensured! where there could be no motive adequate to order; no obligation; no rights, wrongs, or duties; where a Byron, "a Borgia, or a Cataline," should be just as estimable as a Howard, a Luther, or a Paul! where Satan and Gabriel might be equally aloof from condemnation or suspicion, and where the only sin would consist in blaming the sinner! In such a system, there could exist no centre; no cement; no common bond; no fellowship; no community of interests; no happiness; no security; no peace; no corrective; no hope! And if the end of such a desired state of things be to avoid the exist-

ence and the relations of a hell, let us pause before we aver the wisdom of a project that must elaborately defeat itself. The whole universe on that hypothesis would be a hell ; and the prison would be identified with the empire. What man so much an idiot, or so much a maniac, to desire such a universe of misery, such a chaos of utter despair !

It remains to find, if we can, a better law than that of God. If the penalty were less, it would be another law ; but who can prove that it would be a better one ? The being, adequate to such proof, must be every way the paramount of God : he must be more knowing than Omniscience, wiser than Infinite Wisdom, better than Eternal Love ! Who but God understands all the interests which law is framed to represent, and penalty enacted to defend ? A less penalty—would that suffice ? what, when sin is so desperate already that, to gain its purpose, it defies the universe, makes nothing of God, and laughs at “ eternal damnation ? ” There would be no adequate force in a sanction, which would leave to rebellion the solace of hope, the power of finished expiation, and the pledge of ultimate recovery. It is the exclusion of hope, which constitutes the power of penalty to instruct, to warn, and to prevent transgression. It is this, which defines “ the second death ; ” which interprets to all the penalty that is threatened ; and which supplies perhaps the greatest possible motive, known to God himself, to deter from sin. If you allege that even this is incompetent, since sin abounds :

I answer, it is probable that sin has infected in fact but an inconceivably small proportion of the vast community of worlds which people the dominions of God ; I answer, that the inference from its partial prevalence that none is prevented, and that more will not be perfectly and eternally prevented by means of its actual punishment and its gracious pardon, as illustrated in hell and heaven forever, is inconsiderate and vain ; I answer, that the same reasoning, applied to the present world, would abolish law, unhinge society, and make a vast Aceldama of the globe we inhabit ; and finally, I answer, that all the innumerable habitations of the universe constitute but one empire under God ; that all are mutually and eternally related ; that the history of each will have its influence on all the others ; that events, such as have occurred in that department to which we belong, shall be rehearsed in other departments, and with lasting effect, for the instruction, admonition, and preservation, of millions as many as the individuals of this ; and all this probably as the appropriate means of ETERNALLY PREVENTING ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF SIN, after the scheme of our system shall be conducted to its consummation ! “ to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God ; according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Here, I have no doubt, is the final cause of hell’s perpetuity—the utility of which God will make it the eternal occasion !

Otherwise, that is, if no use could be made of it, it is but a just and necessary deduction, from his perfect attributes, who swears by his own existence that he has "no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," that hell would be instantly and forever annihilated!

Let us look for a moment at the precept of the law; and see if it be not good, and if we are the sages that could change it for the better. Do we object to its spirituality? to its cognizance of motives? to its high exaction of internal purity and benevolence? What improvement then could we allege? The law must respect outward conduct alone; must be a mere regulator of the mechanics of action; must induce an authorized system of decent hypocrisy, fictitious goodness, and holy grimace! And this is the suggested improvement!

Think of the object of legal requisition. It is love! Is not this good? Does it not tend to happiness? Can any other source of communicated happiness be soberly compared with this? Were love always and universally prevalent, how much misery would exist? How came misery to exist, but by breaking the law of God? Was the law given to be broken, or to be kept? Is God pleased with sin or holiness? How much happiness then, did the law, as the grand instrument of moral administration, directly and naturally intend? I answer, happiness, happiness alone, perfect happiness; universal, infinite, eternal happiness; and this to the exclusion of every adverse principle or event. Is the law good? or could purblind mortals legislate a better?

One aspect yet remains to be presented of the excellency of the law. We have all seen its objective goodness, or that which it really tends to produce to others. We are all sensible of the good of being the objects of love; and scarcely a reprobate or demon exists who could not be made to acknowledge it. But shall we forget its subjective goodness? the happiness its very exercise produces? What feelings conceivable or possible, like those of pure love, to beatify their possessor? God himself is blessed forevermore; "God is love:" and were he not love, he could not be blessed. How godlike the blessedness of love! O what essential beatitude, what fellowship divine, to have our whole capacities full and overflowing with this elemental heaven! "Wherefore the law is holy; and the commandment holy, and just, and good." And God is good who gave it. And let all his creatures love, and praise him, who is forever worthy! I only add, that the goodness of the law is identified with that of the Lawgiver; and that it will be the prosperous concern of his government to make that goodness indubitable, in a way of progressive demonstration and progressive conviction, through the infinite cycles of eternity. The period is at hand when not a doubter on this point will exist even in hell! and even there the abhorred conviction will increase forever that the law is good.

Having thus considered, though in rapid outline, the questions proposed, respecting the nature and relations of the law of God, I shall in the conclusion crave your

patience, while I briefly present a few of the lessons of wisdom thence deducible.

1. *The absurdity, sin, and danger of antinomianism.* This very comprehensive word was well invented, I believe by the great apostle of the Reformation, to brand any sentiment that dishonoured or opposed the law of God. Its etymology answers to its sense and warrants its application; meaning enmity or opposition to law. Hence we are authorized to say that there exists in our world, in our hearts, and our reasonings, just as much antinomianism as there is disconformity to law in theory or practice. As a heresy, while it is among the vilest and while it is the great parent of them all, it is an abstract one; being in terms professed, so far as I know, by no church nominal of Christ. But alas! how much of it exists! and worse; how much of its insidious poison, often changing its form and often its name, but never its nature, revels in our bosoms, infects our theological reasonings, and mingles with our very devotions! Antinomianism in the church! It is like the serpent among the flowers of Eden; like "the man of sin" throned in "the temple of God;" like rebellion in heaven when the monster first appeared! Let us beware of it. It may cheat us of our crown. It is just as contrary to the gospel as it is to the law; to the triumphs of mercy as to the claims of justice; to Christ as to his Father. It awfully retards the process of sanctification in God's own elect; it endamages their piety; it disgraces their pro-

fession ; it prevents their discernment ; it lessens their influence ; and it awfully impairs their reward. Shall I add—what I know will affect *them*—it is a most ungrateful return for the holy and unspeakable Love that died for them, “that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

2. *The proper criterion of character is the law of God.* Various indeed are the estimates of human nature as made by its constituents in this world ; and while these differ among themselves through all degrees of the scale, they generally differ more from the estimate of the bible. Why is this ? Plainly because men judge by different standards, while there is but one right standard. Their judgments would be correct comparatively, were their standards of judgment right. To surrender every false criterion, and adopt that of God, marks an important stage of the process of regeneration, from preliminary to complete. So it was with Paul. He exchanged the standard of the Pharisee for that of the Holy Ghost. And how did it revolution into truth all his erring prepossessions ! God regards his law alone in his estimate of men. No other standard will be honoured in the day of judgment. And now, my respected hearers, is this our standard ? Is our estimate of others, and especially of ourselves, governed by the law of God ? what think we then of human nature ? that *it* “is holy, just, and good ?” or that it is “evil, and only evil, and that continually,”

till the grace of the gospel, obeyed and loved, changes, cleanses, and conforms it, to the eternal excellency of the law? Hence,

3. *The necessity of approving the law, of understanding and loving it, of being cordially pleased with it, nay of delighting in it ; the necessity of this, I say, in order to the existence of piety in the soul.*

There is no salvation in the gospel, for those who continue the enemies of the law. It is just as hard—if hard it will be called—to love grace as justice; precisely as hard! Nor is the repentance genuine, nor the faith operative, nor the humility true, nor the devotion acceptable, nor the hope authentic, of those whose evangelical piety leaves them disliking or barely tolerating the law of God.

4. *The connexion between correct views and feelings, in relation to the law of God, and doctrinal soundness in religion.* The man “that loveth or maketh a lie,” does it because he is the enemy of the law of God. Those who understand and love this law, are such lovers of truth that the total doctrine of the bible, so far as it is discovered, just suits them. Hence all their moral feelings are in favour of evidence; in league with divine testimony; and divorced from “the spirit of error.” Hence the lovers of the law of God pursue wisdom; search for truth; pray for divine guidance; examine incessantly the scriptures; make the necessary decisions and sacrifices; and become habituated to the lessons of inspiration, “strength-

ened, established, settled," in "the faith once delivered to the saints."

5. *The gospel is good.* This is one of the most important lessons we can deduce from the nature and relations of the law. The law and the gospel are not the same; they are not to be confounded; they are to be compared, distinguished, and understood as things that differ: while Luther was certainly right in making a thorough and discriminating knowledge of both, a criterion, or rather the criterion, of a sound and competent theologian. But still they are mutually and vitally related; so that both are good, if either is good; and both are evil, if either is evil. The law and the gospel have a common soul of holiness; a common source of holiness; a common scope of holiness. The gospel as a system gives to the law perhaps the highest, brightest, fullest honour that it can ever receive. If the law be evil, how then can the gospel be good? If the law be good, and that superlatively, good also is "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." How absurd then and vain for us to bless ourselves with hope through the gospel, while our hearts are inimical to the law! while we dislike to hear any preaching that explains and vindicates the law! while possibly we dare to calumniate the holy and enlightened faithfulness of those preachers, who treat of the law as Apostles treated of it; and while we are not afraid to stigmatize it as legal preaching, dull morality, and a dereliction of the gospel! An antinomian preacher is an anti-evangeli-

cal preacher ; and the hearers who prefer such an one, would do well to examine again “ which be the first principles of the doctrine of Christ :” for the law and the gospel have a common moral nature.

There is treachery organized in the grace of the gospel, if there be not righteousness embodied in the structure of the law : and there is hypocrisy, or, if you will, self-deceit and vanity, in our favouring the grace of the gospel, and preferring that grace, and glorying in that grace, unless we sincerely approve, nay morally enjoy, the eternal excellency of the law of God. And if this test of character, in relation both to the law and the gospel, be appalling, it only proves our own perilous antinomianism. Among tests it is lucid and transcendent. It is a test for which we ought to be grateful ; for it is one of the best in our possession. By its faithful use, “ coming to the light,” we may *ascertain* if we have any piety ; we may put our hope into the light of demonstration ; we may exchange the fear that “ hath torment” for the love that is “ perfect ;” we may forego forever the wretched *exuvix* of our servile trepidation, for “ the spirit of adoption,” saying to God, *My Father, my Father*, and departing from him no more ; we may see ourselves legitimately identified with the elect of God, to whom he “ gives eternal life,” who shall “ never perish,” and whom no power is “ able to pluck from his hand ;” we may with equal modesty, and truth, and infallibility, infer our eternal destination to eternal glory in the new Jerusalem ; we may expect

heaven, and prepare for it, and desire it, for we shall soon be there, exulting, soaring, triumphing, in the glory ineffable of the Redeemer: for, a lover of the law, and a truster in the gospel, is connected to God himself, by that indissoluble tie that is constituted forever by "the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord." We may hence learn

6. *Why the gospel is ever rejected.* Does this terrible phenomenon result from the nature of the gospel; the scantiness of its provisions; the insincerity of its overtures; or the meanness of its spirit? None of these. The true reason cannot be told too plainly or repeated too often—it is just because men hate the law of God! It is this that helps their logic to its quibbles and their philosophy to its difficulties—because they are the positive enemies of righteousness! It is this that renders duty so impracticable, service so difficult, and piety so painful, that they indefinitely postpone them all! It is this that keeps them impenitent, unbelieving, and "double-minded." It is this that veils the meaning of the sacred page; renders the divine testimony ambiguous; and maintains such a standing army of doubts. It is this that builds the bowers of heresy, inspires the spirit of liberalism, and stimulates the ingenuity of excuses. It is this that generates the sirens of infidelity; gives plausibility to the arguments of error; and soothes the disobedient with the flattering unctions of hope. It is this that convinces the fanatic, establishes the corrupter, and qualifies the vender of new revelations: this

that makes folly pass for wisdom, sophistry for argument, and impiety for worship. It is this that macerates the body, sanctions austerity, begets formalism, enacts revolting penance, dreams of infallibility, and paganizes the gospel of God. It is this that constitutes the sceptic, the reviler, and the atheist. It is this that misrepresents religion as forbidding, licentiousness as manly, and responsibility as absurd. It is this alone that prevents universal faith, and piety, and blessedness—it is antipathy to the law of God! And yet this is precisely the cause that must not be assigned—because it is uncharitable, puritanical, and not to be believed! The preacher who alleges this only as the true cause, is rated as well meaning, but feeble, deficient in originality, and scarcely worth hearing: although this is the grand statement of the bible, pervading all its pages, characterizing all its preachers, and made with overpowering light by the Lord Jesus Christ himself; who said, “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” This is the reason, and in substance the only reason, why the gospel is ever rejected. The fact rests on the sober evidence of reason, observation, and scripture; and is as palpably true as the great astronomical facts of the solar system, according to Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. It requires a strange compound of ignorance, impiety, and sophistry, to doubt that those who reject the gospel “have not the love of God in them.” The deist, the

mohammedan, the jew, the heretic, and the sceptic, all in general claim to love the Creator, (if they admit his existence,) although they reject the gospel: that is, according to their own account, they are friends of righteousness, very good and virtuous, honest and excellent men, notwithstanding their rejection of "Jesus Christ and him crucified!" But what is a friend of righteousness that loves not the law of God? And is it possible to love that law and yet reject the gospel? No moral impossibility was ever greater or plainer! Look at that law; and show me the man who can intelligently believe that anything but opposition to it could consist with rejection of the gospel! Truly "the secrets of many hearts are revealed!" For one, I am not afraid to say that if I could at all believe that love of righteousness ever prompted the rejection of the gospel; nay, if I were not convinced that enmity to the law is the universal prompter of such rejection, I would not only tear my commission as a preacher—I would surrender also my hope as a christian; and in the indignant spirit of a man, I would deny all religion, and even the existence of its eternal Author! I ought rather to say—I cannot imagine what I should do, in a predicament that could not occur without a total revolution of all that we know, or feel, or hope, as creatures of rational existence. This argument will be very entertaining in the day of judgment; for then it will be managed precisely as it ought to be; and its disclosures will instruct and astonish the concourse of immortals,

God is adequate to its full elucidation ; and he will lecture us convincingly. May none of you, my hearers, evade conviction till that day ! In anticipation of its scenes, I affectionately beseech you, to trust Jehovah now ! There is no venture in the homage. You will lose nothing, jeopard nothing, injure nothing, by rendering to God the confidence of your total minds, and participating here the holy triumphs of his people in the prospective and eternal vindication of his often dishonoured name ! And lastly, we learn

7. *The authenticity of hope in the gospel alone ; as demonstrated from the impossibility of authentic hope on the basis of the law.* To sinners, such as the law shows that we are, the gospel alone ministers grace, peace, and hope. And to the gospel alone, as the medium of hope, cling the spirits of all who are lovers of the law ; while, conversely, the enemies of the gospel hope—if they hope at all—on principles of law : they hope where christians despair, and despair where christians hope. Here is the grand paradox of religion ; that they alone who love the law for duty, alone abandon it for hope ; that those alone whose hope is valid, acknowledge their ill-desert, and resort to the atmosphere of grace in order to breathe the breath of spiritual life ; that those alone who have virtue, abandon their own goodness as the ground of hope, “being justified freely, by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” To effect a spiritual divorce from the law as the basis of hope, and to inspire

hope on the principles of the gospel alone, is the great object of conversion. Thus, in relation to the law of marriage, does the Apostle illustrate the change, in the first four verses of this chapter. "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?"—or, as unquestionably it ought to be rendered, "as long as it (the law) liveth." By a splendid personification he speaks of the law, as our natural or first husband; whom, according to the law of marriage, it were wrong to abandon in his life-time: for then he could protect, and cherish, and ennoble us; and then our obligations, and "the covenant of our God" upon us, exclude all other suitors, and bind our affections, duties, and services, absolutely to him alone. But, he argues, if our husband is dead, our obligations are cancelled; and we are at liberty to contract a second marriage with one who is immortal and life-giving forever. Now, the law, as the Bridegroom of souls, is in effect dead; and so can be our husband no longer. From him there is no hope. No matter what killed him; in whatever way accomplished, the results are the same: and though sin was his murderer, and that sin our own, yet he is dead; and the deed is not only irrevocable—it is an instance of death without any resurrection, the slumbers of which are profound and interminable. And what is the inference? Why, that we may cease our mourning, burn our weeds of wo, and end our widowhood—otherwise

shrouded in infinite despair! Here is hope, and only here. An other lover, and he incomparably preferable, "the Prince of life," offers us his heart and his hand, in honourable and eternal espousals. To him we may be legitimately "married;" never to be divorced, never separated even by death, never upbraided by conscience or truth or goodness. His resources are infinite, suited to our condition, and devoted to our weal. We accredit his affection, accept his proposals, and consummate eternal union before the witnessing earth and the conscious heavens! "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." Of this marriage, my brethren, literal marriage was from the beginning the instituted type. To illustrate this was one of the formal ends intended to be answered by the existence of the relation: and to celebrate this grandest relation of man, and most gracious relation of God, will be one of the desired occupations of the assembly of the glorified forever. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of

them that are saved shall walk in the light of it : and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie ; but they that are written in the Lamb's book of life." Amen.