

The Law
And Gospel
Samuel Davies

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And
Gospel

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with a stanza or two from that evangelical writer, Dr. Watts:

Go, ye that rest upon the law,
 And toil, and seek salvation there;
 Look to the flames that Moses saw,
 And shrink, and tremble, and despair:
 But I'll retire beneath the cross;
 Jesus, at thy dear feet I lie;
 And the keen sword that justice draws,
 Flaming and red, shall pass me by.

SERMON LIV.

THE LAW AND GOSPEL.

GAL. iii. 23.—*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*

IN such a time of general deadness and security as this, it may really afford me painful perplexity what subject to choose. Now this and now that occurs to my mind, and engages my thoughts to pursue it for a while; but after many fluctuations and perplexities, I have at length fixed upon this text, and determined to open to you the nature of the law and gospel, and your concern with each of them: and I have this encouragement, that this may be styled an Apostolic subject, by way of eminence, and is that very doctrine which did such mighty execution among the Jews and Gentiles, and converted thousands to the faith of Christ, upon the first publication of Christianity. The law and the gospel were the grand topics of St. Paul's preaching, if we may judge of his sermons by his Epistles; for in his Epistles, particularly those to the Romans and Galatians, he insists at large upon these subjects. These may also properly be called the doctrine of the reformation from Popery; for no sooner did that sacred light dawn, than it began immediately to clear up the nature and the difference between the law and the gospel, and the condition of mankind as under the one or the other of these constitutions. Luther, in particular, made this the great

scope of his preaching and writings; and he wrote an excellent commentary upon this epistle to the Galatians for this very purpose. And who knows but such a subject as this, which has been the ancient weapon for demolishing the kingdom of Satan, and wounding impenitent hearts, may do some execution, through the divine blessing, even when managed by my unskilful hand? Be the event what it will, in the name of the Lord, I would make the attempt.

I shall be the shorter at present, in explaining the text, because the whole of the following discourse will tend to reflect light upon it.

Faith, in my text, and in sundry places in this epistle, seems to have a complex signification: it signifies the object of faith, revealed in the gospel, or the method of salvation through faith in the righteousness of Christ; and it also signifies the grace of faith in the soul, or a hearty compliance with this way of salvation, so that this expression, *before faith came*, refers to the time before the doctrine of faith was revealed in the gospel to the Galatians, and before the grace of faith was wrought in their hearts. Here it may be proper to observe, that the members of the primitive church in general, and particularly that in Galatia, were brought under the gospel dispensation, and embraced the doctrine of the gospel by faith at one and the same time. But they were not, like us, educated under the gospel dispensation; for part of them had been Jews, educated under the Mosaic dispensation, which by way of eminence is frequently called the law; and, as they were under the legal dispensation, they were generally under the influence of a legal spirit; that is, they sought for justification by their own works of obedience to that law.

Another part of them had been educated heathens, and

yourselves pinched closely, and in a sore strait? Do you not feel yourselves imprisoned and shut up under the law? And are not you casting about, and looking out for some way of escape? Well, I will show you the only way left, and that is by faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The gospel! the gospel! Oh that my voice could publish the joyful sound in every corner of this globe inhabited by guilty sinners! The gospel of grace is the only relief for you. Fly thither, ye helpless, law-condemned, self-condemned sinners; fly thither, and you are safe. As depraved and guilty, as ungodly and destitute of all righteousness, except of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Cast all your dependence upon it, and make it the only ground of all your hopes. Regard the law always as a rule of life, and labour to form your practice upon that sacred model: but as a covenant of works, by which you should obtain life, fly from it, abandon it, give up all your hopes and expectations from it: and betake yourselves to the covenant of grace, of pure, free, unmingled grace, without the least ingredient of merit. In this way, I offer you pardon, justification, and eternal salvation; and such of you as have chosen this way may be assured of these blessings, notwithstanding all your sins and imperfections. Oh! that this representation of your condition may recommend Jesus Christ and his righteousness to you! Oh! that it may effectually draw off sinners from all their vain, self-righteous schemes, which, like cobwebs, they would form out of their own bowels, and constrain them to stoop and submit to the righteousness of God, and the method of grace! If after all, they refuse, they will leave this house condemned and under the curse. But such of you as comply, like the penitent publican, you will return to your own house justified, however guilty you came here this morning. I shall conclude

perform it; and now, you that are under the law, take a serious view of your condition. "They that are of faith are blessed," Gal. vi. 9; but faith has never entered your hearts, and therefore you have nothing to do with the blessing. But you may read your doom in the next verse: "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse," (verse 10,) for, "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Thus you lie under the ministration of death and condemnation, and you can never get free from its curse till you can perform impossibilities; till you can annihilate all your past sins, till you can transform your sinful life into an uninterrupted course of perfect obedience. Do this, and you shall live, even according to that constitution under which you are. But till you can do this, till you can yield perfect, perpetual obedience, in your own persons, you can never get free from the curse, or obtain life, while you affect this way of justification. I tell you again, all your prayers and tears, all your repentance and reformation; in short, every thing that comes short of perfect obedience, will avail you nothing at all upon this constitution: they are but fig-leaves that cannot hide your nakedness. And do not imagine that the righteousness of Christ will supply your defects, and procure you acceptance; for his righteousness belongs only to the covenant of grace, and is imputed only to such as have received it by faith; but while you are under the law, you have nothing to do with it. St. Paul himself will tell you, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you would be justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace," Gal. v. 4; you stand entirely upon your own bottom; and God will deal with you just as he finds you in yourselves, without any relation to Christ at all.

And now, my dear brethren, do you now begin to find

were destitute at once of the revelation of the gospel, and of faith in it. Of this sort the generality of the Galatians had been. And yet St. Paul represents them also as having been under the law, not the Jewish or Mosaic law, which the Gentiles had no concern with, but the law of nature, which is universally binding upon all mankind. And as they were under this law, they were also possessed of a legal spirit; that is, they sought salvation by their own obedience to it, as the only way which they knew, and which was natural to them. But, when the gospel dispensation was set up in the world, and the doctrine of faith preached to them, they immediately believed, and so were freed from the outward dispensation of the law, and from a legal spirit at once; and they heard the doctrine, and received the outward dispensation of the gospel, and savingly believed, "at one and the same time." Hence the apostle speaks of their being delivered from the dispensation of the law, and from a legal spirit, and of their being brought under the gospel dispensation, and cordially believing the gospel doctrine, in the same language "as one and the same thing;" and what he says is sometimes equally applicable to the outward dispensation and the inward temper denominated from it, and sometimes more pertinent to the one than to the other. So in my text, the time *before faith came*, is applicable to the state of the Galatians, while under the dispensation of the law, and under a legal or self-righteous temper; and while they had neither heard the doctrine of faith, nor received the grace of faith. And when in opposition to this (v. 25) he observes, "after that faith is come, we are no longer under the law as a schoolmaster:" he means both after the preaching of the gospel, and after it was received by faith. Many more instances of this might be given; particularly chap. iv. 3, 5; Rom. vii. 1, 7.

From hence we may infer, that what St. Paul says concerning the state of those that were under the law, as that "they are in bondage, shut up under sin, under the curse, that the law is their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ," &c., is not to be confined to the Jews, or to persons in that age, but may in part, at least, be applied to us, though we have been educated under the gospel, and never were under the Jewish law; for we may be possessed of a legal spirit, though we live under the gospel, and never were subject to the Mosaic economy. Our observation also supported from hence, that the apostle represents the Galatians (the main body of whom were Gentiles, and had no more connection with the law of Moses than we) as under the law, under the curse of the law, &c., in this sense; and as freed from the law by their faith. Therefore, though the outward dispensation of faith came into our parts of the world before we were born, yet we may apply the text to ourselves and say, *before faith came*; that is, before faith came into our hearts; before the evangelical grace was wrought in us by the power of God, *we were kept under the law*; the original word is very emphatical,* we were prisoners under close confinement, we were held in custody by the law, as by a strong guard, to prevent all escape. *We were shut up to the faith*. Here again the original word is very emphatical,† we were enclosed all round; every way of escape was stopped, but only that of faith; we were shut up to this way; in this way we were obliged to fly, or to continue for ever bound fast under condemnation; *shut up to the faith which should afterwards be revealed*. This also may be accommodated to us, and signify the clear discovery of the gospel to our minds, as an object of faith, by that illumination of the Spirit, which is the cause of it. But it is more properly

* *ἔσθησαν ὑποτακτοὶ τῷ νόμῳ.*† *ἐκκεκλεισμένοι ἐν τῷ νόμῳ.*

"We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law." Gal. ii. 16. But after faith is come, we are at liberty, and no longer under the law, *as a schoolmaster*. Gal. iv. 25. "Righteousness shall be imputed to us also, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Rom. iv. 24. Faith, you see, is the turning point. And so it is represented by Christ himself. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already," John iii. 18; he has sinned, and therefore the sentence of condemnation is already passed upon him by the law. And have you, my brethren, ever been brought thus to believe? Have you found yourselves shut up to the faith, as the only way of escape? and have you fled to the mercy of God in Christ in that way, with all the vigour of your souls?

(4.) If you are under the covenant of grace, then you are not willing slaves to sin, but make it your great business to live to God. This is represented as the privilege and constant endeavour of all that are delivered from the law. *Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law*, which requires obedience, but furnishes no strength to perform it, *but under grace*, which will enable you to resist sin, and live to God. Rom. vi. 14. Ye are dead to the law, that ye might be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that you might bring forth fruit unto God. This is the great design of your divorce from the law, and your marriage to Christ, Rom. viii. 4. "I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." Gal. ii. 19. And do you thus live to God, sirs? Is this the great business and constant endeavour of your whole life? If not, you are not under grace, but under the law, the Egyptian task-master, who demands perfect obedience, but gives no ability to

you are still under it. (2.) If you have been delivered from the law, you have been cut off from all hopes of obtaining justification by your own obedience to it; you have given up this point as altogether desperate; or in the strong language of the apostle, you have been slain by the law. "When the commandment came, sin revived and I died." Rom. viii. 9. *My brethren*, says the apostle to the Christians at Rome, *ye are become dead to the law*, verse 4, that is, ye are become dead to all endeavours, all hopes and desires of justification by the works of the law; you see nothing but death for you in that constitution. And he tells you how this death was brought about; "I through the law am dead to the law," Gal. ii. 19; that is, the law itself became the executioner of all my hopes of life by it, and for ever put an end to all my endeavours to seek justification in that way: it was a view of the extensive demands of the law that discovered to me my own inability to comply with them, and so deadened me entirely to all expectations of life by my obedience to it.

And have you ever, my brethren, been thus slain by the law to the law? Have you ever been made sensible of the absolute impossibility of working out a justifying righteousness for yourselves by your own endeavours, and thereupon given up the point, as hopeless and desperate? If not, you are still under the law, and your hearts eagerly cling to it, and will not be divorced from it. Here you will hold and hang, till you drop into the bottomless pit, unless God deliver you from this legal spirit.

(3.) If you have been set at liberty from the law, and brought under the covenant of grace, you have believed in Christ, and fled to the gospel, as the only way of escape from the bondage and condemnation of the law. It is the uniform doctrine of the apostle, that it is by faith only that this happy change is brought about in our condition.

and peculiarly applicable to the Galatians, while as yet the doctrine of faith in the gospel was not revealed to them. They were held in custody by the law till that happy time came, and then, upon their believing the gospel, they were set at liberty.

My present design is to lay down some propositions for the explication of the apostolic doctrine concerning the law and the gospel, that you may see in what sense mankind are kept prisoners by the law, under condemnation, and shut up to the faith; or to the method of justification, through the righteousness of Christ, as the only way of escape.

The propositions I would lay down are these: That all mankind in all ages are under a law to God: That this law was first given to man, in a state of innocence, in the form of a covenant of works, by which he was to obtain happiness: That it has passed through several editions, and received several additions and modifications in different ages: That this law requires perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience: That it is impossible for any of the sons of men to be justified and saved by this constitution: That therefore God has graciously made another constitution, namely, the gospel, by which sinners may be justified and saved through the righteousness of Jesus Christ: That all mankind are under the law, as a covenant of works, till they willingly forsake it, and fly to the gospel for refuge by faith in Christ: And consequently, that they are shut up by the law to this method of salvation, as the only way of escape.

I. "All mankind, in all ages, are under a law to God." This can be denied by none who grant there is such a thing as sin or duty; for where there is no law, there can be no duty or transgression. If murder or blasphemy are universally evil with regard to all mankind, in all ages, it

must be because they are forbidden by a law universally and perpetually binding. If the love of God, or justice towards men, be a duty binding upon all mankind, in all ages, it must be because it is enjoined by some law of universal and perpetual obligation. This cannot be disputed with regard to the Jews, the subjects of the Mosaic law, who are said, by way of eminence, to be under the law: and the apostle infers, that those who lived between Adam and Moses were also under a law, from the punishment of death inflicted upon them; for as where there is no law, there can be no transgression, so where there is no law, there can be no punishment: for punishment is the execution of the penalty of the law upon an offender, for transgressing the precept. Thus St. Paul reasons, (Rom. v. 13, 14.) *until the law*; that is, all the time from Adam's fall till the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, (about 2536 years.) *sin was in the world*; and consequently there was a law then in force; *for sin is not imputed where there is no law*. But sin was evidently imputed in that period; for though the Sinai law was not then published, "nevertheless death," the penalty of the law, "reigned with dreadful uncontrolled power, from Adam to Moses." Thus you see the patriarchal age was under a law to God. And as to the Gentiles, though they had not the revealed law, yet they were not lawless, but bound by the law of nature: of the contents of which their own reason and conscience informed them in the most important particulars. Thus St. Paul tells us, "that the Gentiles who have not the revealed law," perform by nature the part of a law,* and therefore "are a law to themselves, the works of the law being written in their hearts." Rom. ii. 14, 15. As to us, who live under the gospel, "we are not," as the

* So I would choose to render $\phi\acute{o}\tau\epsilon\tau\iota \tau\acute{\alpha} \tau\omicron\upsilon \nu\acute{o}\mu\omicron\upsilon \kappa\omicron\iota\omicron\upsilon$; and thus it agrees better with what follows, $\kappa\alpha\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma \nu\acute{o}\mu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$.

that makes the difference in this case. Many who lived under the dispensation of the law had an evangelical spirit, or faith in Christ, and therefore they were upon the gospel-plan, and obtained salvation in the way of grace. And multitudes that live in the New Testament age, under the gospel administration of the covenant of grace, and who profess the Christian religion, and were never subjects to the law of Moses, are under the influence of a legal, self-righteous spirit, and therefore are not under grace, but under the law as a covenant of works; upon this footing they stand before God, and they can enter no claim to life upon any other plan. As for the righteousness of Christ, and the grace of the gospel, they have nothing to do with it, because they have not chosen it, and made it theirs by their own personal act.

And would you know whether you are set free from the law, and placed under the covenant of grace? St. Paul, who knew it both by his own experience, and by inspiration from heaven, will inform you. (1.) You have been made deeply sensible of sin and condemnation by the law. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." Rom. iii. 20. I had not known sin *but by the law*, says St. Paul, personating a convinced sinner under the law, *without the law*. Rom. viii. 7; that is, while I was ignorant of the extent and spirituality of the law, *sin was dead*, as to my sense and apprehension of it; *but when the commandment came*, with power and conviction to my conscience, *sin revived, and I died*; that is, I saw sin to be alive in me, and myself to be dead, dead in trespasses and sins, and condemned to death by the law, verse 9; *the law also worketh wrath*; that is, a sense of the wrath of God, and the dreadful punishment of sin; Rom. iv. 14. And has the law ever had these effects upon you, my brethren? Have you ever had such a conviction of sin and condemnation by it? If not,

way. Hence Abraham and David are mentioned by St. Paul as instances of the gospel-method of justification by faith in Christ. Rom. iv. 1-7. I now proceed to another proposition.

VII. That all mankind are under the law, as a covenant of works, till they willingly forsake it, and fly to the gospel for refuge by faith in Christ.

There are but two constitutions that God has set up in our world, by which mankind can obtain life, namely, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, or the law and gospel; and all mankind are under the one or the other. They are all either under the constitution which demands perfect obedience as the only title to life, and threatens death, eternal death, to the least failure; or under that which does indeed both require and enable them to yield sincere obedience, but does not insist upon our obedience at all as the ground of our acceptance and justification, but confers that honour entirely upon the complete righteousness of Jesus Christ, received by the humble faith of a guilty, self-condemned, helpless, broken-hearted sinner. We are all of us, my brethren, under one or other of these constitutions; for to be from under both of them is the same thing as to be lawless, and to be under no plan of life at all. Now, we are under the law while we are under the government of a legal spirit; and we cannot be freed from it till we are brought off from all dependence upon the law, and constrained to choose the gospel-method of salvation as helpless, law-condemned sinners, by our own personal act. We live under the gospel dispensation indeed, and were never under the law of Moses: and yet we may be under the law notwithstanding, as the Romans and Galatians were till they were set free by faith, though they had been heathens, and were never under the Mosaic dispensation. An outward dispensation is not the thing

apostle observes, "without law to God, but under the law to Christ;" (1 Cor. ix. 21,) that is, we are still under a law to God, with all those endearing obligations super-added, which result from the gracious gospel of Christ. And we cannot suppose the contrary, without supposing that the gospel has put an end to all religion and morality, and set us at liberty to all manner of vice and impiety; for if we are still obliged to religion and virtue, it must be by some constitution that has the general nature of a law. St. Paul rejects the thought with horror, that the law is made void by the gospel. "Do we then make void the law by faith? Far be the thought, nay, we establish the law." Rom. iii. 31. This first proposition, therefore, is sufficiently evident, "That all mankind, in all ages, and under every dispensation of religion, are under a law to God." Let us now advance a step farther:

II. This law was first of all given to man in a state of innocence, under the model of a covenant of works; that is, it was the constitution, by obedience to which he was to secure the favour of God, and to obtain everlasting felicity. It was his duty to observe it with a view to obtain immortality and happiness by it; and these blessings he was to secure by his own works of obedience. That the law was first published to man with this view, is evident from many passages of Scripture, particularly from that often-repeated maxim of the apostle, "The man that doth these things shall live by them;" (Rom. x. 5; Gal. vii. 12; see also Lev. xviii. 5; Neh. ix. 29; Ezek. xx. 11, 13, 21;) nay, he tells us expressly "that the commandment was ordained unto life;" (Rom. vii. 10.) that is, it was appointed as a plan by which man was to obtain life. Hence Christ assures the lawyer, who had repeated the substance of the law to him, "This do, and thou shalt live," Luke x. 28. This implies, that if he fully obeyed the law, we would

certainly obtain life by it, according to the original design of that constitution. And when St. Paul says, That the salvation of sinners was a thing which the law could not do, in that it was "weak through the flesh," Rom. vii. 3; it is implied, that it was not weak in itself, but fully sufficient to give life; only by the weakness of our flesh, we were not able to obey it, and on this account it was not able to save us. This proposition also is sufficiently evident, that the law was first given to man in innocence, as a covenant of works, or as a constitution according to which he was to obtain life by his own works. I now proceed to the next proposition, and to show you,

III. That this law has passed through several editions, and received several additions and modifications, adapted to the various circumstances of mankind, and the designs of heaven towards them.

That you may more fully understand this, I would observe, by the way, that the law is either moral or positive. By the moral law, I mean that law which is founded upon the eternal reason of things, and that enjoins those duties which creatures under such and such circumstances owe to God, and to one another, and which necessarily flow from their relation to one another. Thus, love to God, and justice to mankind, are moral duties universally binding upon mankind in all circumstances, whether in a state of innocence, or in a state of sin; whether under the revealed law, or the law of nature. There can be no possible circumstances in which mankind are free from the obligation of such duties, and at liberty to commit the contrary sins. These are more properly the materials of a moral law. But there is another set of duties agreeable to the circumstances of fallen creatures under a dispensation of grace, which I may call evangelical morals; I mean repentance and reformation, and the utmost solicitude to

any of the sons of Adam have been saved since the fall; and that this gracious scheme has run through all the dispensations of religion from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, and from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses to Christ; and that now, by the gospel, it is more fully and illustriously revealed, the object of a more distinct, particular, and explicit faith. Rom. i. 17. It was first published immediately after the first breach of the covenant of works, in that gracious promise, "The seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head." Gen. iii. 15. It was communicated to Abraham in that promise. *In thy seed*; that is, as St. Paul teaches us to understand it, *in Christ*, who shall spring from thee according to the flesh, *shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.* Gen. xxii. 18; Gal. iii. 16. Hence St. Paul tells us, that the Scripture, "foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham." Gal. iii. 8. This was, as it were, the substratum of all the ceremonies and institutions of the law of Moses; and, as was observed, the whole of this law, and the solemn and dreadful manner of its publication, were intended to subserve this scheme, by making men more sensible of their need of it, and constraining them to fly to it for refuge. The prophets also received this evangelical light, and continued to diffuse it around them, till the Sun of Righteousness arose; but all these discoveries were but dark, when compared to the clearer revelation we have of it in the New Testament, particularly in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians, which designedly treat upon it. However, they that lived under former dispensations, had light enough to direct them to place their trust in the mercy of God, and to look out with eager eyes for the Messiah, through whom alone they were justified, though they might not have distinct ideas of the

re-obtain the forfeited favour of our Maker. These are universally binding upon mankind in their present state, and result from their circumstances, and consequently partake of the general nature of a moral law. By a positive law, I mean a law not necessarily resulting from the reason of things, and our relations and circumstances, but founded upon the will of the lawgiver, and adapted to some particular occasion. Such was the appendage to the first covenant, "Thou shalt not eat of the tree of knowledge." Such were the institution of sacrifices immediately after the fall, the ordinance of circumcision given to Abraham, and the various ceremonies of the law of Moses; and such are baptism and the Lord's supper, and the institution of the first day of the week for the Christian Sabbath under the gospel. These ordinances are not binding in their own nature, and consequently they are not of universal or perpetual obligation, but they are in force when and where the lawgiver is pleased to appoint. And the moral law, under every dispensation, has had some of these institutions annexed to it; though in the state of innocence, and under the spiritual dispensation of the gospel, they are but few and easy.

I now resume the proposition, "That the law has passed through several editions, and received several additions and modifications." With regard to Adam in his original state, it only required of him the duties naturally binding upon him, and adapted to his condition as an innocent creature, with this one positive precept added, that he should not eat of the tree of knowledge. This was its model while a covenant of works. But when man fell, it received several additions and modifications adapted to his circumstances, and subservient to the gospel, the new plan of life, which was immediately introduced, as I shall have occasion to observe more fully hereafter. Such was the early institution of sacrifices, to prefigure the grand atone-

God, which is by the faith of Christ. This you see is the way in which it comes *unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference of Jew or Gentile here: all being freely justified by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ.* Therefore we conclude that *a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law:* so Rom. iv. *To him that worketh, and on that account is considered as righteous, the reward is reckoned not of grace, but of debt:* he is not at all dealt with in the gospel method, which is entirely a plan of grace (ver. 4;) *but to him that worketh not, with a view to his justification, and is not considered as entitled to it upon the account of his works, but believeth, humbly trusteth and dependeth upon him that justifieth the ungodly, upon him that considers the sinner, whatever previous endeavours he may have used, ungodly, and destitute of all personal righteousness, to such an humble believer, his faith is counted for righteousness;* (ver. 5.) *Even as David describeth the blessedness of that man, to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works, &c.,* (ver. 6.) Gal. ii. 15. *We, says St. Paul, who are Jews by nature, (and therefore stand most fair for justification by the law, if it were possible) and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified,* (ver. 16.) These, my brethren, are but specimens of the many plain and express Scriptures that support this doctrine; and I think it plain, upon the whole, that if we can understand anything contained in that sacred book, we may safely conclude that this truth is contained in it.

Here I would hint, what I intended to enlarge upon, had the time allowed, that this is the only way in which

ment of Christ, which then took its rise, and thence spread through all nations, though they soon forgot its original design and evangelical reference. Thus the law continued for many hundred of years, from Adam's fall to the deluge.* After the deluge, it was given to Noah, with the institution of sacrifices continued, and the addition of some new laws, particularly the allowance of animal food, with the exception of blood. And it is this addition of the law that was most strictly universal with regard to all mankind, who were the posterity of Noah, the second root of human nature, and who received it from him; though it was soon forgotten or adulterated with superstitions. After some time,† when the knowledge and worship of the true God was lost in the world, he was pleased to separate Abraham from the idolatrous world, to set up his church in his family, and to continue the former edition of the law, with the addition of the sacred rite of circumcision, as a token of initiation in the church, and of the purification of the heart, and as a seal of the righteousness of faith. And this constitution continued in the posterity of Abraham for about four hundred and thirty years; when it was new-modelled and improved by a more full edition. A summary of the moral law was published with the utmost majesty and terror on Mount Sinai, and written by God himself on two tables of stone. But besides this moral law, and besides the positive institutions given to Adam, Noah, and Abraham, God was pleased to add a great variety of positive laws, concerning the manner of sacrificing, and the system of worship, concerning ceremonial pollutions, concerning the Jewish policy, or civil government of that people, and many other things: of all which we have a full account in the law of Moses.

* About 1656 years. *Universal History*, Vol. xx. p. 2.

† About 427 years, circumcision was instituted 451 years after the deluge.

at all for his own justification; I say, when such an humble sinner, despairing of relief from himself, renounces all his own righteousness, and trusts only and entirely in the free grace of God in Jesus Christ; when he places all his dependence upon his righteousness only, and most earnestly desires that God would deal with him entirely upon that footing, then he believes; and then, and thus, this righteousness is made over to him, and accepted for him, and God no more views him as a law-condemned sinner, but as one that has a righteousness equal to all the demands of the law, and therefore he deals with him accordingly: he pronounces him just, and gives him a title to life and every blessing, as though he deserved it upon his own account, or had a claim to it upon the footing of his own obedience to the covenant of works.

My brethren, I am bold to pronounce this the gospel-method of salvation; and, whatever scepticism and uncertainty I feel about many other things, I have not the least scruple to venture my soul, with all its guilt, and with all its immortal interest, upon this plan. If I have thoroughly searched the Scriptures for myself in any one point, it is in this. And could I but lay before you all the evidence which has occurred to me in the search, I cannot but persuade myself it would be fully satisfactory to you all; but at present I can only point out to you a few passages. Acts xiii. 39. *By Jesus Christ, says St. Paul, all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses, which was the most complete dispensation of the law.* Rom. iii. 21-38. *Now the righteousness of God without the law (that is, the righteousness which does not at all consist in the works of the law, but is quite a different thing from it,) is manifested—even the righteousness of*

* *Χριστὸς νόμον δικαιώσων.*

stitute; it is the covenant of grace alone that allows of this, and the law must be so far dispensed with in order to make room for such a constitution.

This, my brethren, is the nature of the law, of every law that God ever made under every dispensation of religion, before the fall, and after the fall, before the law of Moses, under it, and under the gospel. In all ages, in all circumstances, and from all persons, it requires perfect, perpetual, and personal obedience: to the performance of this, it promises eternal life: but the sinner, by every the least failure, falls under its dreadful curse, and is cut off from all the promised blessings. And hence it most evidently follows,

V. That it is absolutely impossible for any of the fallen sons of men to be justified and saved by the constitution of the law. Take what dispensation of the law you please, the law of innocence, the law of Moses, or the moral part of the gospel, it is impossible for one of the fallen posterity of Adam to be saved by it in any of these views; and the reason is plain, there is not one of them but what has broken it: there is not one of them that has yielded perfect obedience to it: and, therefore, there is not one of them but what is condemned by it, to suffer its dreadful penalty. This is so extremely plain from what has been said, that I need not insist upon the proof of it. I shall only subjoin the repeated declaration of the apostle, that "by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified." Rom. iii. 20. Gal. ii. 16. And that "as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." Gal. iii. 10. Come, "ye that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law." Gal. iv. 21. Hark! how the thunders of Sinai roar against you as guilty sinners. Can you pretend that you have always perfectly obeyed the law? that you have never committed one sin, or neglected one duty?

view was subservient to the gospel. But this was not all; for, 2. If we consider that covenant as the constitution of the Jewish church and state, and the model by which they were to govern themselves in the land of Canaan, it was properly a covenant of works. As a visible national church and civil society, God would reward or punish them in temporal things, according to and for their works. While they continued obedient to the external forms and institutions of this law, they were to hold their possessions in the land of Canaan; and, when they publicly violated this covenant, they were cast out of their possessions, and brought into slavery. These temporal possessions they held upon the footing of a covenant of works; though such of them as were good men, were saved by quite a different constitution, even in the way of grace, and faith in Christ, as we are now, as I may have occasion to observe hereafter.

This remark will explain such places in the law and in the prophets, where we meet with such declarations as this, "If a man observe my statutes, he shall live in them;" of which you have more instances than one in the 18th chapter of Ezekiel. They are said to be "just," &c., as members of the Jewish church and state, because they had observed the externals of that law, which was the constitution of their republic, and which in that view only, required an external obedience, which it was in their power to yield; and therefore they were entitled to life and its blessings, in the land of Canaan, according to that constitution. Indeed God seems to have governed not only the Jews, but all the kingdoms of the earth, considering them as civil societies, very much in this manner, upon the footing of a covenant of works. Spiritual and immortal blessings are bestowed upon individuals in every age in a way of grace, without regard to their personal works; and the

holiness necessary to the enjoyment of them, is not merely outward, but in the whole soul; and it is God only that can work in them. But nations, as such, are under a kind of covenant of works, the condition of which is an external observance of the laws of God, which is in their power, without any special assistance from him; and as they perform or break this condition, temporal rewards and punishments are distributed to them by divine Providence. This thought brings me in mind of thee, O Virginia! O my country! for if God deal with thee upon this plan, how dreadful must be thy doom! But to return. This suggests to us another reason why the apostle so often speaks of the Mosaic law as a covenant of works; namely, because, considering it as the constitution of the Jewish republic in temporal respects, it was really such; but it was never intended that the Jews should seek or obtain spiritual or immortal blessings by it under this notion. I have been so much longer than I expected on this proposition, that I must be the shorter on those that follow. The next proposition is,

IV. That the law of God requires perfect, perpetual and personal obedience. This holds true with regard to every law of God, whatever it be. If it requires purely moral duties, it requires that they be performed exactly according to its prescriptions. If it requires evangelical duties as repentance or sincerity, it requires perfect repentance, perfect sincerity. If it requires the observance of any ceremonial or sacramental institutions, as sacrifice, circumcision, baptism, or the Lord's Supper, it requires a perfect observance of them. Men have got the notion into their heads of a divine law that does not require perfect obedience, or that makes allowance for imperfection. But this is bad sense, as well as bad divinity. It is the greatest absurdity imaginable; for to say that a law does

not require perfect obedience, is the same thing as to say, that it does not require what it does require: to do all that the law requires, is perfect obedience; and since it requires us to do all that it does require, it certainly does require perfect obedience; and if it does not require perfect obedience, it does not require all that it does require: which is a direct contradiction. In short, it is plain to common sense, that there never was, nor ever can be, any law, moral or positive, divine or human, that does not require perfect, absolute obedience. Farther, Is not every sin forbidden? is not every duty enjoined? Undoubtedly it is: you are not at liberty to commit one sin, or to omit one duty, not even the least. Indeed the very notion of sin and duty supposes a law forbidding the one and enjoining the other; and they are just commensurate with the prohibitions and injunctions of the law. This is also the voice of Scripture. That perfect obedience is required, appears from the dreadful curse pronounced upon every transgression for the least offence: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." Gal. iii. 10. Not some subjects, but every one, of every rank and character, must not only resolve or endeavour, but must do, not some things, or many things, but all things written in the law; not for a time, or for the most part, but he must always continue to do them. And if he fail in one thing, in one moment of his existence, the penalty of the law is in full force against him, and he falls under the curse. His obedience must be universal, perpetual, and uninterrupted. There is the same reason for his obeying all in all things, and at all times, as for his obeying in anything, or at any time. And all this obedience the law requires of him in his own person: the law allows of no imputation of the righteousness of another; no obedience by proxy or sub-

ence; that all our obedience to the law, all our endeavours, all our repentance, prayers, and reformation; in short, all our good works, all our virtues and graces, are not at all the ground of our justification; they do not, in whole or in part, more or less, constitute our justifying righteousness; so that in justification we are considered as guilty, law-condemned sinners, entirely destitute of all personal righteousness; and we are pardoned and accepted, only and entirely upon account of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, imputed to us, and accepted of God for us, as though it were our own. I say, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, or his yielding the most perfect obedience to the precept of the law, and suffering its dreadful penalty for us, or in our stead, is the only ground of our justification. This is a righteousness as perfect as the law of God requires. And consequently the law is not repealed when we are justified in this way; it is still in full force; and all its demands are answered by this righteousness, which is equal to the severest requisitions of the covenant of works; only it is dispensed with in one particular; namely, that whereas the law properly requires personal obedience from every man for himself, now it accepts of the obedience of Christ as a surety in our stead, and is satisfied by his righteousness imputed to us, as though it were originally our own. But how do we obtain an interest in this righteousness? I answer, it is only obtained by a vigorous pursuit, and in the earnest use of the means of grace; but then all these endeavours of ours do not in the least entitle us to it, or it is not at all bestowed upon us on account of these endeavours; but the grand pre-requisite, and that which has a peculiar concurrence in obtaining it, is an humble faith; that is, when a sinner, deeply sensible of his guilt, of his condemnation by the law, and of his own utter inability to do anything

This dispensation continued in force from that time for about 1525 years, till the ascension of Christ, and the day of Pentecost, when the more glorious dispensation of the gospel was introduced. It is often called the law, by way of eminence; and it is to this most perfect dispensation of the law that the apostle particularly refers, when disproving the possibility of a sinner's justification by the law. And it was to his purpose to have this particularly in view: for if a sinner could not be justified by this edition of the law, which was the most complete, and that in which the Jews peculiarly gloried and trusted, it is evident that he cannot be justified by the law at all, under any form whatsoever. Now, though the gospel, or the covenant of grace, as I shall observe presently, was interwoven with this dispensation, as well as every other, and it was the great design of the law to be subservient to it, yet there was much of a covenant of works in this dispensation, and that in two respects. 1. In the dreadful majesty and terror of the publication from amidst the thunders and lightnings, and darkness of Sinai, which spread such a horror through the whole camp of Israel, and made even Moses confess, *I exceedingly fear and quake*. This had not the aspect of friendship: it did not appear as if God was amicably conversing with an innocent people, and setting up a constitution of mere grace among them.' It rather appeared like a dispensation of a provoked God towards a guilty people, intended to strike terror into their impenitent hearts, to make them sensible of his awful majesty and justice, of the terror of his law, and of their aggravated breaches of it. There were indeed gracious designs at the bottom of all this: but they were such designs as could not be accomplished till sinners were made deeply sensible of their dreadful guilt, and the terrors of God and his holy law, which they had broken; and therefore to accomplish them,

God puts on all these dreadful forms of wrath. Thus the Sinai dispensation was intended to prepare men for the method of salvation through Christ, by making them sensible of their miserable condition by the breach of the covenant of works; and hence, it had so much of the terrible aspect of the covenant of works in its promulgation. This is one thing the apostle means, when he says, *the law worketh wrath*, Rom. iv. 15, that is, it is adapted to impress a sense of divine wrath upon the minds of the guilty. Hence he calls that dispensation *the ministration of death and condemnation*, 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9; that is, it had a tendency to excite a sense of death and condemnation: and he makes Hagar, the bond-woman, an allegorical representation of this Sinai covenant, Gal. iv. 24, 25, because it was calculated to excite in sinners a spirit of bondage, or to strike them with a sense of slavery, terror, and condemnation. This view also clears up the meaning of several things which he says of the Jewish law as that *it was added because of transgression*, Gal. iii. 19; that is, it was annexed to the covenant of grace, because it was necessary that sinners should be made deeply sensible of their guilt and condemnation by the breach of the law, in order to their seeking salvation in the way of grace through Christ. And hence, says he, *the law was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ*, ver. 24; that is, the painful discipline and smarting rod of the law were necessary and conducive to constrain us to fly to Christ as the only Saviour, without whom we were shut up under irreversible condemnation. And again, Rom. v. 20, *the law entered, that the offence might abound*; that is, that it might appear that the offence had abounded, and overspread the world; and, therefore, that they stood in the utmost need of a Saviour.

Thus you see, the dispensation of the law at Sinai had the appearance of a broken covenant of works, and in this

Alas! you must hang down the head, and cry, guilty, guilty; for in many things you have all offended. Then, be it known unto you, there is no life by the law for you. Set about obedience with ever so much earnestness; repent, till you shed rivers of tears; fast, till you have reduced yourselves to skeletons; alas! all this will not do, if you expect life by your own obedience to the law; for all this is not that perfect obedience which it absolutely requires of all the sons of men; and whatever is short of this is nothing, and leaves you under its curse. You may make excuses to men, and to your own consciences, but the law will admit of none. Perfect obedience! perfect obedience! is its eternal cry; and till you can produce that, it condemns you to everlasting misery; and all your cries, and tears, and reformation, are to no purpose. Thus you are held in close custody by the law; you are shut up under condemnation by it. And is there no way of escape? No; there is no possible way of escape—but one; and that shall be the matter of the next proposition.

VI. That God has made another constitution, namely, the gospel, or the covenant of grace, by which even guilty sinners, condemned by the law, may be justified and saved by faith, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

According to this constitution there is encouragement for sinners to repent and use the means of grace; and all who are saved by it, are not only obliged to yield obedience to the law, but also enabled to do so with sincerity, though not to perfection. They are effectually taught by it “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly and godly in the world;” and, in short, holiness of heart and life is as effectually secured in this way as in any other. But then, here lies the differ-