

LAW AND GOSPEL

A SERMON

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“So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.” Galatians 4:31

WHEN God takes a sinner in hand, and opens up to that sinner that to which he is in captivity, held fast by his sin, that has in it the strength of God's eternal law, and held fast by the unalterable law of the great God; and God so deals with that man as to make him feel that he is just as his holy word declares, altogether as an unclean thing, and all his righteousness's are as filthy rags; when the man is sunk down as into Jonah's hell or Job's ditch, and he is brought down so low, made so wretched and so miserable that nothing but the interposing arm of an omnipotent Savior can lift him out of this pit of bondage into the liberty of the gospel; such, and such only, can really appreciate the mediation of Christ, the counsel of God, and the provisions of the gospel. It was good advice which the mother of King Lemuel gave him; and as you are aware, the word "Lemuel" signifies "God with them;" and though that mother was not Sarah literally, but another woman, yet it is the same mystically, and has evidently a mystical meaning, and her advice to her son evidently refers, by a usual custom of speech in the Bible, to the language of the covenant of grace to Christ Jesus the Lord. And one part stands like this: "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish." When a sinner is brought to feel the wretched, perishing condition he is in, then he must have the strong drink of "I will and they shall;" there must then be no hesitation about the matter; there must be a declaration of the omnipotent efficacy of the blood of Christ, of the eternal and inevitable certainty of the promises of God. "The heavens and the earth may pass away, but my word shall not pass away." And while the mere Pharisee is saying, "It is too strong for me," not so with the man who feels that nothing but "I will and they shall" can be of any use to him. "And wine unto those that be of heavy hearts." When sin lies on the heart, when Satan comes and enthrones himself, as it were, on the heart, when mountains of trouble lie on the soul, the man is pressed down, and then he wants the wine. And what does the wine mean? Why, those blessings which are by the blood of the everlasting covenant. And when Jesus thus steps in, he sets the prisoner free, and such an one knows to whom the honor and glory of his salvation belong. Hence the mystic mother goes on to direct the Savior what to do, and the Savior did just what he was there directed to do, "Open your mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction." This is one part of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to make us feel that our sins have appointed us to destruction, and we cannot reverse that appointment by anything we can do; that

God's law has appointed us to destruction; "That," says the apostle, "which I thought to be unto life I found to be unto death;" and we cannot by anything we can do reverse this; therefore, the sinner's mouth is stopped, he has not a word to say why he should not be swept away by the besom of destruction, and be eternally lost. Now the Savior opens his mouth in the cause of those whose mouth is thus shut. Hence, "Open your month," said the mystic mother to the mystic son, "judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." The rich Pharisee can plead his own cause, but the publican comes with nothing but sin to call his own, and therefore is a poor, perishing, cast down, lost, miserable creature. His prayer is very short, but very real, and very vital, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This is the way that the Lord brings men into the liberty of the gospel; this is the way in which he makes himself known. And while many of the people of God are brought along gradually at the first, yet some of their after experiences will teach them astonishing things; the Lord will make them drink the wine of astonishment, and in many respects show them hard things, experiences and trials they never before dreamt of; and now that fulness of the gospel, that certainty of the gospel, that great variety of provision of the gospel which at one time was a mere common matter with them, is everything. Now they become lovers of God's truth, and move such away if you can from the liberty of the gospel.

You will observe, that we have in connection with our text some very deep experiences; and you may depend upon it that I shall not use this morning upon the subject before me very measured terms; I can tell you I shall not be very nice in what I have to say, to set forth what we are by the law, and what we are by the gospel; for there is a depth in the misery of our condition that no language can exaggerate, there is an awfulness in being lost that no language can depict, and there is a blessedness in being saved that may well be called unspeakable. Christ is indeed our unspeakable gift, and the joy in reserve for those who are brought to know their need of him is unspeakable joy, and the language in heaven by which the fellowship and communion are carried on is language unspeakable by mortal tongues, as the apostle gives us to understand, We have this morning two things to notice. First, *the contrast between the bondage of the law and the liberty of the gospel*. Secondly, *that the gospel must always be kept above the law*. The law must always be kept under the gospel; Hagar must never be put above Sarah, but Sarah must be kept mistress over Hagar.

First then, *the contrast between the bondage of the law and the liberty of the gospel*. "Tell me," said the apostle, "you that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?" He then goes on to show what is meant by the two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. "He who was of the bondswoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise." Here we have, then, the first feature of this distinction between law and gospel. But lest I should get, as it were, somewhat astray, and talk about other people, I shall try and find Ishmael and Isaac in every Christian, that every Christian is himself both Ishmael and Isaac. That is what I shall first try to set forth. Ishmael, therefore, sets forth or represents not only all that are left in a state of nature, but it represents what the Christian is after the flesh. Now what has the Christian in him after the flesh? Why, the Christian feels that he has in him a Satanized nature, I have in me, and you have in you, whether you see it and know it or not, a nature that is as bad as the devil, if not worse. I like the idea of Erskine upon this, his words are rather strong, but very true:

"As all amphibious creatures do,
I live on land, in water too;

To good and evil equal bent,
I to both a devil and a saint.”

I can tell you this, that I know what Mr. Hart’s words are in my own experience, where he says,

“Full of enmity to God,
Led captive by the devil.”

Ah, says one, I am a believer, and I am never there. That is because you have never been tried. Let the Lord take every comfort from you, and hide his face from you; let Satan come in like a flood, and let all your sins that are in reality forgiven, be presented, let all the judgments of God be presented, and let every mercy and every hope of being saved be taken away; why, you will quarrel with God, you will feel all the demoniacal enmity; you will in your own heart curse the day of your birth, you will wish you had never existed, for of all the wretched creatures on earth you seem to yourself to be the most wretched; and you are right enough, for the apostle gives us to understand that such are the dealings of God with his people, that if we had hope only in this life, we should of all men be the most miserable. Therefore, it is impossible to speak too badly of the fallen nature which the Christian has in him. Whatever Ishmael was, it only represents very feebly what we are after the flesh. Have you ever thought, brethren, to look to yourselves, to your own person and personal experience, to realize the fulfilment of that scripture, “I will put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent”? Do you know what that hardness of heart, what that rebellion, what that carnal enmity against many dealings of God with you, do you know what that is? I will tell you; it is the seed of the serpent within you, and this seed of the serpent within you rebels against God most mightily. And do you ask me what that mourning is, what those hungering’s after God are, what those trembling’s are, what that approbation of his truth is, what that decision for his truth is, and what that determination, the Lord enabling you to go on to seek his face, do you ask what that is? The answer is, it is the seed of the woman, and the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head. It is true the other shall bruise the heel, the part that is not vital; but the new man shall overcome the old. So that every Christian has in him the seed of the serpent. Why, our nature is as full of lies, and enmity, and murder, and everything that is vile, as the word of God declares it, that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” And as Ishmael was born before Isaac, and died before Isaac, so we were children of the flesh before we were children of the promise. Isaac came, but when Isaac came, Ishmael did not like it. And when God regenerated our souls, the devil did not like it; and so, he stirred up our nature within, and our nature does not like it. Here, then, are the two sons. So then, “tell me, you who desire to be under the law;” and if you are determined to hold fast one law work as a help in the matter of your salvation, you will be reckoned as under the law. “I testify again,” said the apostle, “to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.” Just adopt one law work to displace any one gospel work, and then Christ shall profit you nothing. So then if you are under the law you will be judged as a beast, as a devil, as an atheist, as a guilty, filthy wretch, as one that deserves the deepest and the most endless wrath of almighty God. I cannot describe to you the evils to which you would be condemned by what you are in your nature. Our heart lies open to God. Now, with such a nature as this, ready to rebel, ready to disbelieve, and always one with the devil, our nature tempts the devil as often as the devil tempts us, if not oftener, and we run after him in our old, carnal mind as much as he runs after us, if not more. The Christian knows what it is to wander, to the grief of the new man, in a solitary way, and seem to find no city to

dwell in. Why to give such persons as these a conditional promise, to give such persons as these a conditional Savior, to attempt to save such persons as these, or sanctify, or justify, or put them right, by something conditional, how, I would ask, in common sense can a devilish nature do anything divine? How, I ask, can they that are in such a nature as this, such flesh as this, how can they please God? Why, after the flesh, we are infinitely repulsive to God. Therefore, it is the leprous house must come down; this depraved flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Ah, those that see and know this, how they tremble at it. And it is one of the most difficult things in the world, the Lord alone can enable us to understand the truth and believe it, that notwithstanding this our direful state by nature, yet such is the nature of the promise that not a single fault will be laid to our charge if we are brought to receive the things I shall presently dwell a little upon; for “the Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel.”

Now Isaac was by promise. Let me ask you, one and all of you, what sort of a promise was it? Well, say you, it certainly was a positive promise. “Sarah *shall* have a son;” and Abraham staggered not at this promise, accounting God was well able to perform what he had promised; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. What was the order of this promise? You shall have a son, and he shall be so and so *if* so and so? No. friends, this promise that God gave to Abraham was in Christ Jesus. What a sweet lesson you have in that; may the Lord help you to understand it better than I can set it forth. When Isaac was bound hand and foot, and the deadly weapon was raised about to take his life, the wood laid in order, and the fire about to be kindled, these are little things, but they represent the judgments that await us all. All at once came the voice, “Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do you anything unto him.” There it is. He looked round, there was a noble sacrifice, the ram; for the ram was reckoned the noblest sacrifice of the Levitical dispensation, so that God would there set forth Christ in his sacrificial character in the nobleness of it. The ram was slain, and Isaac escaped. “Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do you anything unto him.” He is free from the law now; the wood of his sins shall be his burden no more; the deadly weapon shall be raised against him no more; the fire shall be kindled against him no more; he shall be bound no more, free to eternity. As the dear Redeemer is like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether, so the soul is as the hind let loose, giving goodly words; sin blotted out, forgiven, forgotten, cast for ever away. Such, then, is one distinction between the child of the flesh and the child of the spirit. You have the Ishmael within you, and you have the Isaac within you; a praying Jacob, and at the same time a carnal Esau. What, have I got Esau within me? Yes. Well but, say you, Esau would have murdered Jacob. Yes, and your old man would have murdered your new man long ago if it could; it sets in upon it with the determination to do away with it. But he that has begun the good work carries it on, and while you are a child of promise, that promise is yea and amen, and never was forfeited yet. “You are born of an incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever.” So then, brethren, when we thus look at what is after the spirit, then we are children not of the bondwoman; we have done with her, we have no more hope there. You might as well tell me of the devil having hope as for us to have any hope after the flesh.

“Man, vaunt your native strength no longer;
Vain is the boast, all is lost,
Sin and death are stronger.”

Well then, here are the two. And by and by the old man will die, this mortality must give up, and immortality will take its place; this corruption must give up, and incorruption take its place; this

earthly must give up, and the heavenly take its place; this poor weak body must give up, and a mighty body take its place: this perishable body must give up, and an imperishable body shall take its place, rising into eternal glory by virtue of the promise. Oh, my hearer, what a jewel it is to be convinced thus of what we are after the flesh, that we may renounce all confidence in the flesh, and that we may know that, without faith in Christ, and in the promise of God by Jesus Christ, in whom we receive that that sets us free, we cannot please God.

But, secondly, I notice the contrast between the bondage and the liberty. The apostle says, "These are the two covenants," that is, figuratively and representatively. "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia;" mount Sinai, a very tempestuous, rugged, solitary, barren place. And so, if we are taught of God, we have found out that the law, as it stands against us in the first Adam, is a very tempestuous, a very solitary, and a very barren place; and of this wilderness, this solitary place, you may well say, "What a wretched land is this, that yields us no supply;" the consequence is, you will want to find some way by which supply is to be had. But let us look at this matter. The apostle said, "which genders to bondage." How does it gender to bondage? I will tell you; in this way: The law notes every one of your sins, every idle thought; why, if some of you were taken to task for the idle thoughts you have had since you were in this chapel this morning, and judged by them, you would be lost as sure as you exist. One leak will sink a ship; and so, one sin will damn the soul to hell eternally. The law takes notice of every fault; we do not take notice of them until the Lord convinces us. And the convinced sinner, I will tell you what he is somewhat like; he is somewhat like a man in a court of law. The man has got into trouble, but he hopes that his previous character, he does not think anyone knows anything bad of his previous character, he hopes that will soften the matter, and that he will get off pretty easily. Presently there stands a limb of the law, an agent of the law, whom we call a policeman, and he has got a long paper in his hand; and somebody whispers to this poor thing and says, "Do you know what that agent of the law has got in his hand?" "No, sir." "He has got a long list of previous convictions against you; and presently, when you come to test the matter, he will bring in all this long list of previous convictions, and if you are not hanged, you will certainly be transported for life." Dear, how he does tremble at that man; how he does tremble at that long list. Oh, if it were not for these previous faults, I should not mind. Just so the sinner under God's laws, when convinced of what he is. When the Lord took Saul of Tarsus to task and put him into court, Why, Saul, do you think there are no previous convictions against you? Why, you have been a blasphemer, and injurious all your life. "Mount Sinai, which genders to bondage." Not one jot nor tittle of the law shall fail. Here are my sins written against me as with an iron pen. What am I to do? Presently in comes this beautiful scripture, "blotting out;" ah, what does that mean? there is something in that; I like that. Ah, but if God had not read down to you the list of your evils and the state you are in, you would not have appreciated that. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us," containing an account of all our faults, "and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Presently this same agent of the law comes in, and the man says, He has not got that list now, what has he done with it? The agent comes to the prisoner and says, "Come, you must not stop here, you are pardoned, you are set free, your character clear, and there is no fault against you, and it would now be a crime to mention your faults to you, for the law will not allow people to mention your faults." And you cannot mention the people of God's sins to them without offending God, for they that do so are spoken of as living upon the sins of the Lord's people; and "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect." "Mount Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Agar." Ah, sin brings me into bondage; there is the list; but when brought to Jesus Christ, he has blotted out all my sins,

past, present, and future; I am free, and free for ever; I walk with a God of mercy and love and liberty; not a single fault against me; I may look to God daily; and the Lord said, "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins." Ah, see the mighty difference then, that the law condemns every sin, and the gospel pardons every fault, and even extenuates us in some of our weaknesses; "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Ah, sweet freedom of the gospel. The obedient life and atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ brings us from the law, from Sinai, from the wilderness into the promised land, where our God has everything for us, and nothing against us. Here, then, is what you are after the flesh, and what you are after the spirit; here is where you are in bondage, and here is where you are free. But this is very hard work to believe, the Lord alone can enable us really to believe this.

I have already anticipated the next thought, namely, enmity and love. "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now." I therefore need not repeat this part, that our old fallen nature is enmity against God, and, as it were, persecutes the new man; so that the Christian hates God and loves God; the Christian is a bitter enemy to God, and yet a sincere friend to God, and would shed, as thousands have, the last drop of his blood rather than part with him. Mind you, I do not say that the Christian has these evil doings in his old nature with the Christian's consent; no, "It is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me." This may seem going a long way, and I dare to say that some of you can hardly understand it; but if you live long enough you will, I can tell you that. Do not you dream that you are going to get any better; and do not you dream that the wilderness will be more pleasant; and do not you dream that the devil will be less busy with you; for the nearer you get to your end, the more he is mortified to see you have got on so far. Ah, he says, what, not given it up yet? No, says the man, and by God's grace I never mean to give it up. And so, Satan is angry, because he knows he has but a short time. Thus, then, such persons that know what they are after the flesh, they receive the covenant promise of God, they are brought into the new, the everlasting covenant; that covenant being the free woman, everything is there free; such persons are brought out of the bondage of the law into the liberty of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. "So, then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

Then thirdly, another representation we have is, that the bondwoman and her son are to be cast out, and that the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman; keeping up the idea, though I shall have to extend beyond that presently, that our old nature is to be cast out. Now in the 14th of Leviticus you have an account of the leprous house; and when the house could not be healed, it was taken down, the materials carried into an unclean place, and there they were left. What a striking figure this is of our poor bodies, that are to be taken into an unclean place. The unclean place is the sepulcher, the grave. Why is that unclean? Because it is a place of corruption, of death, of mortality. There you see sin has gained its object. The poor bishop may walk over the ground and consecrate it; I should like to see someone take such a liberty with his grace, as to go up to him and say, "Your grace, you have consecrated the ground!" "Yes." "But the body is mortal still, corruptible still, it is an unclean affair still." For if the body had been clean, no occasion for it to have come down; but it was a vile body, having in it a depraved nature; and the grave is an unclean place, and it will never be consecrated until Jesus Christ himself shall come. So, the materials of the leprous house were left there, and no more notice taken of them. Not so with your poor bodies, no; Jesus will come triumphant down the parting skies at the last great day, and will raise up the house in that way which the holy Scriptures set forth. Here, then, it is that

what we are after the flesh is cast out, and must go into the grave. Thus, the bond child shall be cast out; and when raised from the dead, it will not be the son of the bondwoman. We shall not be raised from the dead by virtue of the law, no; hear you the language in relation to the way in which we shall be raised from the dead; “Your dead men shall live together, with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust; for your dew is as the dew of herbs.” Christ himself has said, “I am the resurrection.”

But then it means also the false church, and her converts shall be cast out. Why are they to be cast out? Because they live and are casting out some part of God’s blessed truth. They may admit Jesus Christ, but not after the due order. David did not make such a mistake as not to have the right ark; but he made such a mistake as not to receive it after the due order; and God, rather than David should be deluded, manifested his disapprobation. So I may receive Jesus Christ, but if I do not receive him in the spirit of God’s truth, after that order in which the Scriptures set him forth, as the mediator of the new and everlasting covenant, then though I receive the right Jesus Christ, yet I displace some part of his truth, and thereby prove that I am still under the law, and by and by I must be cast out; I cannot be saved unless I not only receive Jesus Christ in name, but after the due order. “See you make it according to the pattern showed to you in the mount.” This is an infinitely important matter. May the Lord, therefore, keep us in due order. We do not find that these Galatians had set Christ aside; I will tell you what they did. Those ceremonies which they practiced at Jerusalem at that time as national customs, they now turned into conditions of salvation; just the same as some of our poor fellow-creatures in relation to infant sprinkling, which they call christening. If that infant sprinkling were a national custom, why I would go and get sprinkled tomorrow, just for the sake of conforming to the nation, I should not care about it. But when they turn it into something religious, and even into a condition of salvation, they thereby displace some part of the gospel, and I would not be in the place of such a person for I cannot say what. I do not charge all our clergymen with this, because some know better; but still you know that a great many do so hold. Thus, then, among the Galatians those ceremonies which were harmless when practiced as national customs, became poisonous to men and insulting to God when turned into conditions of salvation; therefore the apostle proclaimed that even if an angel brought any other gospel than the yea and amen gospel which he himself had preached, he should be accursed. And so now, you cannot receive such persons. When a person comes to me in a Pharisaic spirit, and says, It is your duty to love the brethren, when there is a want of unity of spirit, I may respect such persons as excellent characters, but to feel a spiritual love to them is another thing. And they say, It is a good thing for brethren to dwell together in unity. Yes; but we do not dwell in the same house, the same gospel, the same covenant; we do not live upon the same things, and we do not drink out of the same river; they drink out of the river the serpent casts out of his mouth; whereas we drink out of the pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Now, as the bondwoman and her son, or the false church and her converts, are to be cast out, it implies that those who are brought to receive Christ in due order shall not be cast out, “God has not cast away his people whom he did foreknow.” They are heirs of God that are thus brought to know their need; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. Christ could never lose his right or title, because in him was no sin, and he has put away the sins of them that did sin. In him is no sin, the people stand in him, and therefore in them there is no sin as they stand in Christ.

But lastly, *the gospel must always be kept above the law*. The custom of men generally is to put the religion of the law above the religion of the gospel. They bring Hagar in to govern Sarah, they

bring Ishmael in to govern Isaac. We might give a sample or two of this. Take Saul of Tarsus. His was a law religion, and he called that good; but the gospel of Jesus Christ Saul called evil, and thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. He thought the law ought to have the upper hand, and to ride over everything. If you had shown Saul of Tarsus the 20th verse of the 5th of Isaiah, he would have said it did not belong to him. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;" you are calling your religion good, and the name of Jesus Christ evil; your religion is bad, and you are calling it good; and Jesus Christ is good, and you are calling him evil; "that put darkness for light, and light for darkness." You are putting the law for light; why, the law is all darkness, blackness, tempest, and darkness; there is an impenetrable cloud of sin and wrath. And you are putting light for darkness; the gospel you think is something deluding to men, and say it is darkness, "That put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." Your fleshly, law religion tastes very nice to you, and the gospel tastes very bitter to you, because of the enmity of the carnal mind against God in this matter; whereas to the people of God it is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Now the gospel must always be kept above the law. Let your conscience accuse as it may, you must not lose your confidence in Christ's priesthood; if you do, there is nothing but despair. The law may condemn you, and you may see yourself condemned by every commandment of the law; never mind, the gospel is above the law. There is no law, now, in our comparatively, at least, happy realm, whereby the monarch is at liberty to condemn the innocent; but there is a law by which our monarch can pardon the guilty. Now our God has formed a law by which he has pardoned his people; and there is no law by which the innocent can be condemned, and as they stand in Christ they are perfectly innocent; the law is dead to them, they are dead to the law; to them there is no condemnation whatever. So that the gospel must be kept above the law. There is a great deal of talk in our day about the law, but let us have the gospel; we are to live by the gospel. When the Lord would live with the people, he would not live with them at Sinai; there was no access there; but he lived with them at Zion, where he was near to them, and they to him. The Jew of old thought well, I do not know what this law was given for if not to get to heaven by; how is this? Well, says the apostle, "the law was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." Men would set to and see what they could do with the law; and what did they do? From the moment the law was given to the birth of Christ, was there one man that dared to come forward and say, that he had been as holy, righteous, just, and good as that eternal law of God? Not one. Therefore, the law was added as a means of convincing of sin, until Christ should come; he met it, he is the end of it, and he established it. And some of the Jews seemed to say, Well, the Lord gave the promise to Abraham, but he has given the law since; so, we must do something now. It was all very well for Abraham to get to heaven by grace, but we must do something now. Why, says the apostle, "The covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." God's promise has in it a provision that meets the law. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made."