

The Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ (V)

Is There "Moral" and "Ceremonial" Law?

By Cecil Willis

The subject of the Law and the Gospel encompasses a broad field of study. For the past several weeks we have studied categorical statements of the New Testament that the Old Covenant was taken away in the body of Christ. With the wealth of material in the New Testament on this subject, and the vast multitudes who misunderstand it, I deem it wise that we continue our study of this important theme for a few weeks yet. This week we want to be very specific in our study. We want to study a fundamental error of most Sabbath-keeping religious groups. When we study passages showing that the Law of Moses was done away by the death of Christ, this is enough to persuade most people. But some religious groups have peculiar ideas about the Law, and therefore they construe these New Testament teachings to coincide with their pre-conceived religious views. Therefore it is necessary that we devote some time to these misconceptions of truth.

What Is Meant By "Moral" and "Ceremonial" Laws

First; we need to understand the teaching of most Sabbath-keeping denominational bodies. They teach that the Old Testament Law actually consisted of two laws. Sometimes these are classified as three laws, namely: moral, ceremonial, and civil. But ordinarily they refer to the "double-law" of the Old Testament. They mean by this that this law consists of the moral and ceremonial law. It is rather odd how people can coin terms, and then as freely use them as though the Bible were filled with such expressions. For example, the Modernist dissects the Bible in such a way that he very commonly speaks of the "P" or "J" document, and many other such documents even though there is no hint of such documents existing from the Scriptures. Or they quote as casually from "Second Isaiah" (another Modernistic dissection of God's Word) as though they were personally acquainted with him. Sabbitarians make the same mistake by persistently referring to the "moral" and "ceremonial" laws; as though such a distinction occurred on every page of the Scriptures.

A deeper explanation of this error is in order, before we begin studying a refutation of this basic error. The "moral" law is synonymous with God's law. It is said that God's law is the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue. It consists of the Ten Laws that God delivered to Moses, and that God wrote with His own finger. According to this view the moral law, or the Ten Commandments was never destroyed, but is yet binding upon us today. Since the law to keep the Sabbath was a part of the moral law, and it is

perpetuated upon this dispensation, some denominationalists meet on the Sabbath (Saturday) to worship, and say that we are doing wrong when we meet on the First Day of the week. But' what about all the Scriptures we have previously studied that show that the Law of Moses was done away? This is precisely where the significance of their error is seen.

The ceremonial law is the Law of Moses. It consists of all the laws given in the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, except the Ten Commandment Law. Remember, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20; Dent. 5) are, for these people, a part of the moral law, and were never done away. They say the New Testament scriptures which teach that the Law was done away, apply exclusively to the ceremonial law.. So they profess to believe what the New Testament says about the law (which for them means nothing more than the ceremonial law). So for the Sabbath-keepers that might have been studying with us for the past several weeks, our studies have presented no problems. For each time the Word said the Law was done away, they mentally say, "Yes, but that only refers to the ceremonial law. The Law of God, the Ten Commandment Law, is yet binding upon all men." We want to study what the Bible says concerning such a distinction. In advance we might say that not only does the Bible fail to make such a distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws, but it contradicts the-making of such a man-made distinction.

We are told that each time the words "the Law of Moses" occur, it means the ceremonial law, and that each time "the Law of God" occurs, it refers to the moral law. But the Bible makes no such distinction. In fact, in several instances in the Scriptures these two terms are used interchangeably. But before we study these instances, let us observe one quotation from an outstanding Sabbatarian. In speaking of this "double law," he says, "No question, therefore, more vital to the interest of Sabbath-keepers can be proposed" (Synopsis of Present Truth, p. 258). He says this is the most important issue for Sabbath-keeping people, and I concur in this statement, for if this distinction will not stand the test of Bible investigation, neither will their entire religious system. For remove this premise, and the entire foundation for Sabbath (Saturday) day religion is destroyed.

The Terms Are Not Used Interchangeably

So we now want to investigate this all-important premise. First of all, let us study a passage in which the so-called distinctive terms are supposedly used interchangeably. The Law of Moses or the ceremonial law, is said to have been given by God, and the Law of God is said to have been given by Moses. This would once for all destroy such a fundamental premise as this one of the Sabbath religion. At the time of the return of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity, a copy of the Law was discovered, and Neh. 8, tells

of the public reading of the Law. The distinctive Sabbatarian terms are used interchangeably. Verse 1 says, "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel." Verse 2 says, "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation." Verse 3 says, "And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." We read about those that helped in the understanding of "the law" in verse 7, and verse 8 says, "So they read in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." Verse 14 reads, "And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month." Verse 18 reads, "Also day by day, from the first day into the last day, he read in the book of the law of God."

Now let us summarize the names by which the Old Covenant is referred to in this chapter. (1) It is called the book of the law of Moses (v. 1); the law, (v. 2); the book of the law (v. 3); the law, (v. 7); the law of God (v. 8); the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses (v. 14); the book of the law of God (v. 18). So the one Law is called both the Law of God, and the Law of Moses. It is the Law of God as given by Moses, and it is the Law of Moses as given by God. No Sabbatarian lives that can harmonize this passage with their so-called "double-law" theory. Remember they say the Law of God refers only to the Ten Commandments, and the Law of Moses refers to the "ceremonial" portions of the old Testament. But in Neh. 8, the Law of God and the Law of Moses are one and the same Law.

The Law Has Been Done Away

The New Testament passages we recently have been studying that state that the Law of Moses was done away, do so by referring to the Law of Moses merely as the Law. For example, in Eph. 2:15, Paul said the Law of commandments was done away in the cross of Christ. In this, he referred to the Old Testament Law. Such is the usage of the word "law" in the book of Romans. But Paul was not using the word "law" to designate either the Law of Moses, nor the Law of God in the nomenclature of denominationalism. He simply is using it to refer to the whole of the Old Covenant.

What does he say about the Old Covenant? We studied last week on the subject of "Spiritual Adultery" as discussed by Paul in Romans 7. The adulterous union was that of trying to be married to the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ at the same time. So he concluded his remarks by saying, "But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6). So Paul said that we are no longer under the Law. Notice the usage of the simple expression "the law" in describing

our release from it. What is meant by "the law"? Whatever it refers to, it was done away. Not only do we want to learn from this chapter that the law was done away, but we also want to see that "the law" refers to the Ten Commandments.

Paul said, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet: but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting: for apart from the law sin is dead" (Rom. 7:7, 8). Paul said that sin was defined by the Law. Later we will study the purpose of the Law, and will learn that one of its purposes was to define adequately the limits of right and wrong. Now the Law, said Paul, states that one is not to covet. Remember it is the Law from which we have been discharged. What is the Law that says one is not to covet? Turn back to the Old Testament and you will find that "Thou shalt not covet" is the tenth commandment in the Ten Commandment Law. So here Paul said that the Ten Commandment Law is called "the law." Sabbatarians would say that Paul must have used the term "law of God" in order to speak properly of the Ten Commandments. But friend, whose prerogative is it to coin the terms of Scripture? Is it some man's who has a pet doctrine to defend? Paul knew what he was talking about. He was speaking of the Ten Commandment Law, and he said, from it we have been discharged. There is not a Sabbatarian living that can answer this argument. It is no argument devised by me nor any other man, but it is an argument devised by inspiration by the Apostle Paul. It destroys the only foundation of Sabbatarianism. Paul, in no uncertain terms, said, 'I am talking about the Ten Commandment Law, and we are now dead to it, or have been discharged from it.'

Conclusion

There is one other misunderstanding that needs to be clarified. Sometimes the people who say the Law of Moses is taken away are called "antinomians," a term which the people who use it, probably do not understand. It simply means that we are people who are against law, which is a false accusation. We are not against law, but we believe what the Law of Christ says about the Law of Moses being taken out of the way, and nailed to our Savior's cross. We believe in strict adherence to the Law of Christ, so to apply the term "antinomian" to one who believes thus, is a misnomer. Believing that we are bound by, and will be judged by the Law of Christ, we strive to the extent of our ability to live upright in the sight of God, humbly asking God's forgiveness when we fall. We exhort people to study and obey the Law of Christ. Believe on Him as the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and obey His command to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (This topic will be further discussed in our next article.)

