

# SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

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BY

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## SERMON XV.

### THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL.

2 CORINTHIANS iii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

*If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.*

THE authority of Saint Paul, as a minister of Christ, was so much undervalued by some of the Corinthian converts, that he was often obliged to vindicate his own personal character among them, and to magnify the dignity of his office. The epistle before us was written partly with this object in view. In furtherance of it, the apostle draws in the text a contrast between the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, and shows how far the ministry of the one excels that of the other, by proving the superior glory of the gospel above the glory of the law.

In endeavouring to derive instruction from his words, let us consider, first, the description which he has here given us of the law; secondly, his description of the gospel; and, thirdly, the superior glory of the one, when compared with the other.

I. The words of the text afford us, first, *a description of the law.*

We are not however to understand by this term that original law only, which is the universal law of God's kingdom, the law of the whole creation; but rather that particular modification of it, which was given to the Israelites on mount Sinai, and which formed a principal part of the Mosaic dispensation. But as there is no essential difference between the moral part of this dispensation and the original law of God, they may, with the greatest propriety, be spoken of as one and the same law; and the words before us may be applied to the one, with as much propriety as to the other.

1. Now the apostle calls this law "the ministration of condemnation." Not that it at once condemns all who are under it, irrespective of their obedience or disobedience to its commands. The angels have been under it from the

hour of their creation, and yet we know that a great part of them have never been condemned by it. But being a “holy, just, and good” law, it cannot connive at sin. It requires perfect, sinless obedience in all who are under its authority; and it consequently condemns the creature, as soon as the creature becomes a sinner. Its plain and unequivocal language to the Israelites was this, and it is the same to every rational being in the universe, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” It is evident therefore, that the Israelites, and all who have been partakers of human nature since it was defiled by sin, must be subject to this curse, must be under the condemnation of this law, must as sinners be brought in guilty before God, and stand before him as condemned criminals.

2. Hence the apostle calls this law “the ministration of death.” Its sentence is a sentence of death. All who are condemned by it, are condemned to die. This is its invariable decree; “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

Natural death, the death of the body, is a part of this sentence, but it is not all of it. A more dreadful part is the death of the soul; not its annihilation, but that spiritual death which makes us so careless about spiritual things in this world, and that eternal death which includes in it the utter loss of all that can render existence a blessing in the world to come. This death is nothing less than being cut off for ever from God, the fountain of happiness; and connected by an eternal chain with that dreadful being who is the source of all misery.

Now from this death, from the execution of this sentence, the law provides no resource. It flows indeed from the divine goodness, and was instituted and is maintained for purposes which, in their ultimate consequences, are purely benevolent; but then it has nothing to do with mercy; it is a law of pure, unmingled justice. Sacrifices for sin, it is true, were added to it under the Mosaic dispensation of it; but these must not be considered as possessing any inherent power to remove its curse, or to atone for the transgressions committed against it. They were merely typical of that great sacrifice for sin, which was to form a part of another and more glorious dispensation. They could not expiate guilt, they could not save the soul. Saint Paul declares in the plainest terms, that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins;” and even the more enlightened of those who lived under this dispensation, saw that it was in vain to “come before the Lord with burnt offerings;” that the high God could not be “pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousands of rivers of oil;” that he would not take even their “first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul.”

The sinner therefore, under this law, becomes, on his very first transgression, a condemned sinner, a hopeless sinner. He has the curse of a holy God upon him, and he is without any means whatsoever of removing it. Justly therefore does the apostle call it “a ministration of condemnation and of death.”

II. *But what names does he apply to the gospel, or the Christian dispensation?* He calls it “the ministration of the Spirit,” and “the ministration of righteousness.”

1. It is “the ministration of righteousness.”

We all know what righteousness implies. It is a conformity to some moral standard, to some law; and the law here alluded to by the term, is the very law we have been considering; not that modification of it merely, which was given to the Jews, but that universal and eternal law on which the Mosaic dispensation was built, and agreeably to which all the dealings of God with his rational creatures are regulated.

It has indeed been supposed that the scriptures occasionally speak of some other law, of some new and less rigorous rule of life, which God has given as a remedial law to fallen man; but this opinion must be traced to mean and erroneous ideas of God. It is opposed to the whole tenor of scripture, as well as to many of its plainest declarations; and when brought to the test of reason and common sense, it appears altogether absurd; yea, it is blasphemous; for what does it imply? Nothing less than this, that the all-wise Governor of the universe made some grand mistake when he originally gave his law to this part of his creation; that in consideration of our depravity, he is now constrained to repeal it, and to issue a new one. It makes the supposed ability, or rather the inclination, of a corrupt and changeable creature, the rule of his duty and the standard of his obedience. In fact, it removes from the throne of the universe a God of infinite wisdom, goodness, and purity; and places on that glorious throne a mutable and capricious being, one who can look on sin with indifference, and tolerate and almost sanction that dreadful evil, which has filled so fair a part of his Creation with wretchedness.

A very little serious reflection on this subject will be sufficient to convince us, that God could never give to any one of his creatures any other law, than that which requires perfect obedience and spotless purity; that this is the only law of his moral government, and must be as unalterable and eternal, as his own unchangeable throne. This law and no other is alluded to in the text, and it is in reference to this law, that the apostle calls the gospel a “ministration of righteousness.” He does not call it so simply or chiefly because it enjoins and secures the practice of righteousness among men, but for another

and a higher reason—because it provides for the penitent and believing sinner a complete satisfaction for the offences he has committed against the law of God, and an obedience perfectly commensurate with its demands. It tells him of one who has redeemed him “from the curse of the law, being made a curse” for him. It assures him that God has sent forth his own eternal Son, “made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,” to remove its sentence from them, and to save them from condemnation and death.

But the gospel goes still farther. It tells the ransomed and pardoned penitent, that he who endured the curse of the law for his sinful soul, fulfilled its demands in his stead: that though his God regards him, and must ever regard him, as a sinner, yet for the sake of an obedience wrought out by another, on his behalf, he will treat him as though he were righteous, and raise him to heaven. If we ask the name of this great and gracious Friend, this, he tells us, is the name whereby he shall be called, “The Lord our righteousness.” And he has taught his apostle to give us this testimony concerning him, that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

Thus the gospel reveals to us a way by which sin may be pardoned and the sinner saved, in perfect consistency with the undeviating rectitude of Jehovah’s moral government, and the honour of his inviolable law. This way of pardon and salvation is not opposed to the law; it does not make it void; so far from it, that it is grounded on it; it establishes its authority; it magnifies it and makes it honourable; it gives it the highest and most awful sanction it is capable of receiving.

2. But the apostle applies another name to the Christian dispensation, and calls it “the ministration of the Spirit.” He gives it this name on account of the great out-pouring of the Spirit with which this dispensation commenced, and the abundant communication of the same Spirit with which it has ever since been attended.

Not that we are to suppose that the church under the dispensation of the law, was entirely destitute of this Spirit. It was solely through his gracious and powerful influence, that Enoch walked with God and Noah feared him, that Abraham believed in him and Moses served him. It was he, who filled the souls of the prophets, and enabled them to foretell with such wonderful accuracy the advent, the death, and the glory, of the Messiah. But the great and general effusion of the Spirit was reserved for a brighter and more glorious day of grace. The Son of God, as the Mediator of his church, purchased on the cross all the fulness of the Spirit; and when he ascended into heaven, he obtained the ministration of it, and gave that full display of its power, which filled Jerusalem with astonishment on the day of Pentecost, and added to his persecuted church in one hour three thousand souls. He has ever since

been bestowing the same gift, in a greater or less degree, on the world; and has proved his gospel to be the ministration of an almighty Spirit, by the moral wonders which it has wrought among men.

And this thought should much endear the gift of the Holy Spirit to all who are made partakers of it. It is the purchase of Christ; his donation; the legacy which he bequeathed to us when he left the world; the gift which is to be our comforter in his absence, and to abide with us till he comes again to take us to heaven.

III. Let us now proceed to our third subject of consideration, *the superior glory of the gospel above that of the law.*

The apostle does not assert that the Jewish dispensation had no glory. He speaks of it, on the contrary, as a very glorious dispensation. It had a glorious author, even the King of heaven and the Monarch of myriads of worlds. The object of it was glorious. It was designed to unfold many of the attributes of Jehovah, which the works of creation were not calculated to display; to show forth his infinite justice, purity, and majesty. It was published in a glorious manner, in the midst of thunderings and lightnings, and all the magnificence of terror; and when it was first written, it was not suffered to be transcribed by any human hand, but it was written by the finger of God on tables of stone hewn out by himself; and after it was written, it reflected so dazzling a lustre on him who was appointed to carry it to them, that “the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance.”

But notwithstanding all this display of magnificence, the glory of the law sinks into nothing when compared with the gospel. “That which was made glorious,” says the apostle, “had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory which excelleth.”

The names which are here applied to the law and the gospel, show us at once the propriety of this language. The one is the ministration of righteousness and of the Spirit; it provides for the justification and sanctification of the sinner, while the other provides for neither; it is the ministration of condemnation and death, and leaves the sinner to perish. But the superior glory of the gospel may be elucidated by other considerations.

1. *It offers greater blessings to man, than were offered by the law.*

The Mosaic dispensation had a reference principally to the present life, and most of its promises were temporal promises. And if we go back to the original law on which this dispensation was founded, we shall find that it had not those blessings to offer even to the most righteous, which are offered in the gospel to the most sinful. Its language to the creature is, “This do, and thou shalt live; thou shalt remain in thy present state of blessedness, and shalt

still enjoy the same degree of divine favour, of which thou art now possessed." It is useless to ask what the present condition of man would have been, if he had never broken the law given to him. It would undoubtedly have been a state of happiness. But the gospel offers to his fallen race far richer blessings, than were forfeited by the sin of Adam. It offers us not an earthly paradise, but a heavenly one; not the trees of Eden, but "the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The covenant of works found man in a state little lower than the angels; and it promised him, as long as he was obedient to its precepts, to keep him there. The covenant of grace finds him degraded almost to an equality with the devils; and yet it offers to raise the meanest of his race to a participation of the glory and happiness of the Son of God. The gospel does not merely tell us of the pardon of sin, of deliverance from the curse of the law, of salvation from hell; it lifts up our eyes to the everlasting hills of heaven, and tells the redeemed sinner to hope for a mansion there, a crown and a throne. It bids him stretch his imagination to the very utmost; and when he has heaped together all the joys which his imagination can suggest, it tells him that greater joys than these may be his own; that his heart has not even yet conceived the things which God has prepared for the sinner who loves him. It places within his reach a share of that very joy which satisfies the Redeemer for "the travail of his soul," and more than compensates the many woes of his life, and the bitter sufferings of his death. Well therefore may it be called "a better covenant, established upon better promises."

2. We may see more of the comparative glory of the gospel by recollecting, secondly, that it not only offers to man richer blessings than the Mosaic dispensation had to offer, but *it offers these blessings more extensively.*

The promises of the law were confined to one nation only, and that not a numerous one; and even of this nation, it was but a little remnant that inherited the spiritual benefits of the dispensation under which they lived. The blessings of the gospel, on the contrary, are thrown open to all the world without distinction of nation, sect, or person; and there is not a sinner breathing on the earth, who may not come and take its richest mercies freely, "without money and without price," as soon as he hears of them. The field of the law was the land of Judaea; the field of the gospel is the whole world. Already has the publication of it been the means of saving unnumbered millions, whom the Jewish law, had it continued to the present day, would have left to perish. In every part of the globe, thousands have experienced the saving efficacy of its redeeming grace, and multitudes are daily ascending from the once dark corners of the earth to the light of heaven, and are swelling there its chorus of praise.

And yet extensively as the gospel has diffused its blessings and its conquests, the faithful word of prophecy assures us that it will diffuse them still more extensively. It has already spurned the narrow sphere of a single land, but all the kingdoms of the world are destined to be the scene of its triumphs and its glory. A time is rapidly approaching, when the King of Zion shall be the King of the whole earth; when “every knee shall bow to him and every tongue confess” him to be the Lord. How many years or ages must roll away before this period arrives, we know not; but there is reason to hope that we ourselves have seen the dawn of this glorious day. In our own honoured land a spirit has been excited, and from it has gone forth a voice, which have filled the Christian church with the liveliest expectation. In the troublous times of contention and war, England has lifted up the banner of the cross, and has been calling a perishing world to salvation and to God. The ignorant and the vicious, the lukewarm and the selfish, have beheld her efforts and decried them; they have deemed her labours of love the mere phrenzies of an enthusiastic age; but the hand of the Lord has been with her to strengthen her, and God, even her own God, has given her his blessing. Already have her own borders been gladdened with more abundant means of grace, than ever land possessed before; and she has received many an earnest of future triumphs on foreign shores. Only let the sacred flame which Christian love has enkindled, be kept burning on her altars, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in her hand. Her success cannot be doubtful. It may be distant, but it is sure. The way of the Lord shall “be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations.” The people shall “be glad and sing for joy and “all the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord.”

3. *The gospel has a greater influence on the hearts of men, than the Mosaic dispensation ever had, and is consequently more glorious.*

That dispensation published to the Israelites a pure and holy law, but it had no power to touch their sinful hearts, and to cause them to love and obey it. It gave them precepts, promises, and threatenings; but it could do no more. It was not “the ministration of the Spirit,” and the consequence was, that it left the greater part of them as rebellious and idolatrous as it found them. The gospel, on the contrary, was no sooner published, than it made glorious and surprising changes in the characters and lives of multitudes who embraced it. It was preached by poor and illiterate men, but it made the ungodly tremble, and the hard-hearted weep. It induced the proud to give up the praises of men, and to take in exchange for them the reproach of Christ. It selected its friends out of the fiercest ranks of its enemies; and they who were violent persecutors one day, became willing martyrs the next.

Under the influences of the Spirit, the gospel still proves itself possessed of uncontrollable power over every one who truly receives it. It pierces the

conscience, it softens the heart, it purifies the soul. The lover of pleasure hears it, and becomes a lover of God. The thoughtless trifler is struck by it, and, for the first time in his life, begins to think and pray. The sensualist, as he listens to its sayings, tears his lusts out of his heart; and the man who before loved and served the world, turns his back on it, tramples its sins and follies underneath his feet, and fixes his eyes on heaven. Thus has the gospel brought thousands to righteousness, whom the moral law could not have reclaimed; and thus has it proved its superior glory by its superior influence over the hearts of men.

4. The glory of the gospel is greater than that of the Jewish dispensation, because *it is a glory which will last for ever*.

This appears to be the principal ground of superiority on which Saint Paul insists in the text. He tells us, in the seventh verse, that all the glory of mount Sinai was to be done away; and again, in the eleventh verse, he says, "If that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious."

Not that we are to infer that the moral law is or ever will be abolished. The apostle does not refer in these words to the law itself; but to that ministration of it which was established by Moses, and to those peculiar rites and ordinances which were connected with it under the Jewish dispensation. This dispensation was, in fact, designed to be introductory to the gospel. It was intended, as the scriptures inform us, to be "our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ;" to show to the Israelites their need of a sacrifice and a Saviour, and to point out the Messiah to them as the great atonement for sin. When therefore the Messiah appeared, the design of the ceremonial law was answered, and it became a useless form.

But the gospel is not thus temporary in its nature. Its duration will be commensurate with the existence of the world, yea, with the ages of eternity. It is called "an everlasting covenant;" "a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten." It is described as a covenant built on Christ who "abideth for ever," and partaking of the stability of its foundation.

5. *The gospel is a brighter display of the divine perfections than the law*, and is therefore more glorious. All the attributes of Jehovah which were displayed in the one, are displayed also in the other, and that in a clearer and more glorious light.

In this point of view, the mount of Sinai, with all its dreadful magnificence, sinks into nothing, when compared with the spot on which the Son of God gave up the ghost. The cross of Christ threw a lustre over the justice, the holiness, and the majesty, of God, which these attributes never had before; and gave them a glory, which the destruction of a whole world of sinners under the curse of the law, never could have given them. It was on this cross

also that divine mercy was first displayed to a wondering universe; and it was here that redeeming grace seemed to burst into existence. These perfections had been from eternity in the mind of Jehovah, but his creatures saw them not; they knew nothing of them, till they were discovered on the cross of their suffering King in all their infinite extent and boundless magnificence. Here also was seen unsearchable wisdom, glorifying itself in a plan of salvation by which all the perfections of the Deity are called into exercise, and all acting in perfect harmony, none of them eclipsing or darkening the others, but all mingling their beams, and shining with united and eternal splendour.

These then are some of the points in which the gospel excels the Mosaic dispensation. It is the ministration of righteousness and of the Spirit, while the law is the ministration of condemnation and of death. It offers greater blessings to man, than were offered by the law; it offers these blessings more extensively; it has a greater influence on the hearts of mankind; its glory is of longer duration; and it is a brighter display of the attributes of God. It now only remains that we deduce from this subject a few of the reflections which it naturally suggests.

*How honourable an office is that of a minister of Christ!* The contrast in the text was drawn to show the greatness of the dignity conferred on him, and the title which it gives him to the respect and love of mankind. They who brought to the Israelites a law of condemnation and of death, were thought worthy of honour; but of how much greater honour shall they be thought worthy, who are commissioned to make known to their brethren the gospel of peace; that gospel which discovers to the universe the glory of God, and opens to a perishing world a way to heaven! There is not an angel above us, who would not rejoice to come down to the earth on such an errand as this, and deem himself honoured above his fellows by the work. O that every minister of Christ made his dignified employment the great source of his happiness! O that his brethren were ready to give him the affection and reverence which God has made his due! May all the people of our Zion learn to value the faithful minister of the gospel! and to all her ministers may this grace be given, that they may love to preach among her people “the unsearchable riches of Christ!”

*How great is the privilege which we enjoy in living under the dispensation of the gospel!*

We have often heard of the great love of God to his people of old, and we have sometimes almost envied them the peculiar privileges they enjoyed; but what were their privileges, when compared with ours? They lived under a ministration of condemnation and of death, but we are living under a ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness. They had to learn all that they

could learn of the way to heaven, from types and figures; but “we with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord,” and see plainly marked out before us the path of life. Noah and Abraham, Moses and David, had promises to hope in; but to us these promises have been fulfilled. “A rod” has “come forth out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch” has grown “out of his roots.” The Messiah has been lifted up as an ensign to the people. He has risen as the Sun of righteousness on a benighted world, and in him the nations of the earth are blessed. Our eyes see and our ears hear what many prophets and righteous men, age after age, desired to hear and to see, but were not able. Let us rejoice then in our superior privileges. Let us be thankful for them. Let us be concerned to improve, and dread to abuse them. Let us remember these words of the apostle, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”

*How great a debt of gratitude and praise does every Christian owe to his crucified Lord!*

It was Christ, who turned the ministration of death into a ministration of life and peace. It was Christ, who brought down glad tidings of good from heaven, and purchased the influence of the Spirit for mankind. All our spiritual blessings flow from him. Our adoption is by him. Our redemption and remission of sins are through him. Through Christ, God hears our prayers, and gives us freedom of access to his throne. Through Christ, he justifies and sanctifies us. Through Christ, he blesses and saves us. Our freedom from the law too must be ascribed to the same source. We were not free born, but Christ with a great price, even the price of his own blood, purchased our freedom. It was he, “who blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” Let us therefore exalt the Saviour, and be ever ready to testify our obligations to him. Let us show by the love and honour we bear him, that he is dear to our hearts; that we are not ashamed of him; that we have learned to glory even in his reproach.

*How unwise are they who hope for pardon and salvation, on the ground of their partial and defective obedience to the law of God!*

This law has nothing to do with pardon; it has no salvation to confer. Condemnation and death are the only boons it has for the sinful. Its unvarying language from the moment in which time first began to the present hour, is this, and through eternity it will remain the same, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Have you then never sinned? Can you appeal to the great Searcher of hearts, and call him to witness that you have never left undone that which he has commanded? that you have never done that which he has forbidden? Can you say before him, that no one action of your life has been sinful? that no word of your lips has been an idle word? that no thought of

your heart has been malicious, envious, or unclean? You feel that you must shrink from such an appeal as this; and yet the law requires this appeal from you, before it can bless you. It can sanction and reward none but the spotless. The angels may hope in it, and be happy; but the sinner who would be saved and blessed, must seek the salvation he needs far from this law. He must flee from mount Sinai to mount Zion. He must see that “blackness, and darkness, and tempest,” surround the one, while mercy and grace dwell only on the other.

Renounce then, brethren, the hope you have so long and so fondly cherished, and seek another and a better hope in “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” Pray for a ( humble and believing heart; and that which the merit of all the angels in heaven could never purchase, shall be freely given you by God. Your sins shall be blotted out; you shall be reconciled and brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ; you shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

*How ignorant are they of the gospel of Christ, who make the influence of the Spirit the object of their scorn!*

The words before us plainly imply that from the ministration of the Spirit, the gospel of Christ derives much of its glory; and yet what do some among us deem this Spirit? A glorious reality? No; a fancy, a dream, a thing to be scoffed at, ridiculed, and despised. We acknowledge here perhaps that his sacred influence is a reality and a blessing, and we profess to pray for it; and then we go home, and teach our children and our neighbours to gainsay and deride it. Now what is this conduct, but wretched hypocrisy and deplorable folly? It is treating with contempt that which God esteems glorious. It is mocking at that which is the greatest blessing of heaven. Let the starving man scoff at the food offered him; let the dying man ridicule the only medicine which can save his life; let the sinking mariner jest with the rope thrown out to save him; but never, brethren, let us scoff at the influence of the Spirit; never let us do “despite to the Spirit of grace.”

*How anxiously should every hearer of the gospel desire that it may be made the ministration of the Spirit to himself! that he may experience its softening and purifying influence in his own heart!*

What is the ministry of the gospel without this influence? An empty sound; a cold, lifeless, powerless thing. But what is it with it? The power and the wisdom of God; the awakener of the thoughtless, the sanctifier of the ungodly, the comforter of the sorrowful, the saviour of the soul. Without this influence, we shall hear the gospel, trifle, and perish; with this influence, we shall hear it and live. There is no blessing that we need more than we need this, and there is none which God is more ready to give. He sits on a throne of grace, that he may bestow it on the sinful children of men, and there is not

a sinner upon earth, who is not warranted to approach his throne, and to supplicate it at his hands. May we have a heart to seek it! May we be made partakers of it! May our experience and conduct prove the gospel of Christ to be the ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness, “the power of God to salvation!”