THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL – Chapter 3

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM – With an Examination of DISPENSATIONALISM and the "Scofield Bible"

by Philip Mauro: 1928

THE Bible distinguishes—not seven dispensations, each having a character exclusively its own, but two great eras of God's dealings with mankind; the first of which was preparatory to the second, and the second of which is the completion of the first. Their scriptural designations are:

First: The Old Covenant; or the Law and the Prophets; or simply, the Law.

Second: The New Covenant; or the Kingdom of God; or simply, the Gospel.

This division is not man-made, artificial, conjectural; for it comes to us plainly marked in the structure of the Bible itself, which is composed of two grand divisions, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. (And it should be noted that the word "Testament" is one of the renderings of a Greek word that is sometimes, as in Hebrews 8:6-10, and should be always, translated "Covenant").

Furthermore those two grand divisions of the Bible are clearly marked and separated, the one from the other, by the long stretch of time that intervened between them, there being a period of four hundred years between the last Book of the Old Testament and the first events (Luke I) recorded in the New. GOD HAS SPOKEN: TO THE FATHERS—TO US.

This scriptural division of God's dealings with men into two great eras is referred to in a number of passages. I have

already cited Luke 16:16, “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom o[God is preached,” and John 1:17, “For the law was given by Moses, but Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Another passage that clearly distinguishes them and also sheds light upon the whole subject is Hebrews 1:1,2, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.”

By this passage we learn that God has spoken in two different eras: (t) “in time past,” and (2) “in these last days.” Here we have something certain, and therefore we can safely build upon it. How valuable is the information that these days of the Gospel of Christ are “the last days”! But the dispensationalists must explain away the meaning of these words because, for one reason, their scheme provides for at least one dispensation after the termination of the Gospel era. There are, however, other passages that confirm and settle the meaning of this one. Thus Peter, speaking of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, said: “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:t6, t7); which plainly locates the day of Pentecost in the era which God’s Bible calls “the last days.”

Likewise the same apostle writes concerning Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot, saying: “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.” (I Pet. 1:19, 20).

And the apostle John says with characteristic brevity and emphasis: “Little children, it is the last time” (I John 2:18).

Then we have the words of Paul who, referring to the things that befell the Israelites in the wilderness, said: “Now all

these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world (lit. the ends of the ages) are come" (I Cor. 10:11). And again it is written concerning the first coming of Christ that "now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). It is worthy of special note that this last passage contains the adverb of time, "now," emphasizing the fact that the period of our Lords coming and of His sacrifice belongs to "the end of the ages." We recall that the "Scofield Bible" places it in the era of the law, and does so for the purpose of separating His words (and particularly His Sermon on the Mount) from us, God's children, and allocating them to an imaginary Jewish Kingdom of a supposed future dispensation. How satisfying to the heart, and how fatal to this modernistic and pernicious error are the words of Hebrews 1:1,2, quoted above, which plainly declare that God "hath in these last days spoken UNTO US by His Son".THE LAW OF MOSES AN UNSPEAKABLE BLESSING TO ISRAEL

And now as regards the character of God's dealings with those who were under the Law and the character of the Law itself, it is difficult indeed to account for and more difficult to speak calmly of, the terms of disparagement and strong repugnance in which the leaders of the dispensationalists express themselves when speaking of the Law of God. Of our Lord it was prophesied that He should "magnify the law and make it honorable," but the aim of many of His ministers in these days seems to be to belittle the law and make it contemptible.

Take a few specimens from the writings of prominent dispensationalists: "The Law is a ministry of condemnation, death, and the divine curse." So says the Scofield Bible (notes to Gal. 3:24). But does God's Bible speak that way? We shall see. And another leading dispensationalist declares that, "The law was the instrument of condemnation, and only that." In fact, the leaders among the dispensationalists seem to take a delight—not as did the Psalmists, "in the Law of the

Lord” (Ps. 1:2). but—in inveighing in terms of strongest reprobation against it.

In support of this view of the Law, reference is commonly made to certain passages in Galatians, and also to the seventh Chapter of Romans, which are misinterpreted in such a way as to cause them to render a semblance of support to that view. But before we examine those passages let us get the testimony of Scripture, which is clear and unequivocal, as to what the character of the Law actually is.

We have already cited the testimony of Moses that the Law delivered at Sinai was God’s love-gift to the people (Deut. 33:3). It is further stated in that inspired record of “the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death,” that “they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words” (v. 3). And he goes on to say: “Moses commanded us a law,” and that that law is “the inheritance of Jacob” (v. 4).

A number of passages earlier in the Books of Moses reveal that the law was given as a means of life. Thus, in Deuteronomy 4:1, Moses exhorts Israel to hearken to the statutes and judgments which (he says) “I teach you for to do them, that ye may live.” (And to the same effect see Leviticus 18:5) And concerning God’s law he says: “For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people… For what nation is so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law” (Deut. 4:6-8). Thus the law of God was given the people of Israel to be their life; and it constituted their wisdom, their understanding, and their greatness in the sight of all other nations. And a little farther on Moses says: “And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive… And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments.” (Deut. 6:24,25). And he tells them that

it was because the Lord loved them that He had redeemed them out of Egypt; and that “He is the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments” (Deut. 6:8,9). Thus, they were to love Him, because He first loved them; and they were to manifest their love by keeping His commandments. And is it any different now? Is it not written, “We love Him, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19)? And does not our Lord say to us, even as he said to them “If ye love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15)?

Finally, before leaving Moses, we call attention to Deuteronomy 30:11-20, where he tells the people that the commandment which was to be their life, was not hidden from them (for God had revealed it to them) nor was it far off. It was not in heaven, neither was it beyond the sea; but it had been brought very nigh to them that they might hear it and do it. “And His commandments are not grievous” now (I John 5:3); nor were they grievous then. For on that occasion Moses gave us the great commandment of the law, “to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments” (cf. Matt. 22:37). And He repeats in verse 20 the exhortation that they would “love the Lord,” and “obey His voice”; and for the reason that “He is thy life, and the length of thy days.”

According to Paul, the word which Moses had said was “nigh” into them, not afar off (in heaven or across the sea) was the very same “word of faith which we preach” (Rom. 10:8-13); citing in proof thereof two O. T. passages: “Whosoever believeth in Him shall not be ashamed” (Isa. 28 :16); and “Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32).

Likewise Peter testifies that the things ministered by the prophets during the era of the Law are the same that are now proclaimed by those who preach the Gospel (I Pet. 1:12).

We are not saying, of course, that it is not a far better

thing to be under Grace than under Law; for truly God has "provided some better thing for us" (Heb. 11:40), but we are seeking the testimony of God's Bible as to the character of His law, which the "Scofield Bible" greviously maligns; and its testimony as to just what it meant to the Israelites to be under the law of God instead of being left to their own ways, as were the heathen all around them. And we have seen that Moses, the mediator of that Old Covenant, declared to them repeatedly that, in the possession of the law of God they were unspeakably blessed, and chiefly in that it provided a way of life for all who set their hearts to obey it.

Looking a little further we note that the Book of Psalms opens with a glowing reference to the blessedness of the man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord," and who meditates in it "day and night" (Ps. 1:2). And there are other passages, not a few, which testify that the law of God was a thing in which the heart of man could (and therefore should) find delight, and find also profitable meditations continuously (Job. 23:12; Ps. 119:70,77,92,174).

Now as to the effects of the law, so far from it being true that it was "the instrument o[condemnation and only that," or "a ministry of condemnation, death, and the divine curse," the testimony of the Holy Spirit is that "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul"; and that "the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:7,8). And the same Psalm declares as to the value of the commandments and judgments of the Lord, that they are "More to be desired than gold. Yea, than much fine gold"—more intrinsically valuable than great quantities of the richest treasures of earth—and that, so far from being distasteful and obnoxious, they are "sweeter also than honey and the droppings of honeycombs" (v. 1o, marg.).

The writer of Psalm 119 adds his testimony that there are wondrous things to be seen in the law (v. 18): that it was better to him "than thousands of gold and silver" (v. 72);

that he loved it beyond his power to express (v. 97); that by its precepts he got understanding, and learned thereby to hate every false way (v. 104); and that “great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them” (v. 165).

Solomon too bears witness that “the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light” (Prov. 6:23): and that “the law of the wise is a fountain of life” (13:14). Light and life were surely there for all who sought them; and many sought and found. Solomon also records the words, “Keep My commandments and live, and my law as the apple of thine eye” (7:2).

Isaiah, in foretelling some of the glorious things that Christ (whom God designates in that passage as “My Servant”) should accomplish, says that God had given Him “for a light of the Gentiles”; and that “He will magnify the law and make it honorable” (Isa. 42:6,21). Is not this a rebuke to those who traduce the law and make it despicable?

Likewise during the Babylonian captivity God, in recounting the great things He had wrought for Israel and His many acts of mercy on their behalf, emphasizes the giving of the law as one of the chief of them, saying: “And I gave them my statutes and showed them my judgment, which if a man do, he shall even live in them” (Ezek. 20:11).

Also through Hosea, God, in recounting the offences of Israel, said: “I have written to him the great things o[My law; but they were counted as a strange thing” (Hos. 8 :12). And through the very last of the prophets of Israel, and in almost the last words of his message, God calls to them: “REMEMBER YE THE LAW OF MOSES MY SERVANT, WHICH I COMMANDED UNTO HIM IN HOREB FOR ALL ISREAL, WITH THE STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS” (Mal. 4:4).

Is it possible in the face of these testimonies to maintain that the law was “imposed” upon Israel because of their own improvident choice? that “At Sinai they exchanged Grace for

Law; they rashly accepted the law”? or that “The Law is a ministry of condemnation, death, and the divine curse,” an instrument of “pitiless severity”? If not, shall we allow these false and derogatory things concerning the holy, life-giving and soul-enlightening law of our God to be any longer preached and taught amongst us without earnest protest on our part?

This is a serious matter indeed; and therefore I trust that my readers may be moved to join in a solemn protest against the further publication and sale of a book that many unwary children of God accept as a “Bible,” and which contains so grievous a misrepresentation—amounting to a vilification—of the holy Law of God.WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SAYS CONCERNING THE LAW

But it will be asked whether God’s servants under the New Covenant, the apostles of our Lord who have been taught by Grace, do not give a different character to the Law, from that ascribed to it by Old Testament writers. We have quoted the words of Christ that He came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them; and also Paul’s word to the same effect, that the purpose of the Gospel is to “establish the Law.” Further our Lord declared that “the weightier matters of the law,” which the Pharisees had omitted, are “judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matt. 23:23).

The apostle Paul also, whose words are cited as authority for the teaching we are now examining, speaks clearly and forcefully to the same effect. He says that “the righteousness of God,” which is now manifested apart from the law (i.e. by the gospel) was “witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom. 3:2I). Further he declares that “the commandment” was “ordained ‘to LIFE”; that “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good”; and that “the law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:10,13,14); which testimonies carry the more weight because they are found in that very passage which is supposed to teach things derogatory to the law.

But does not Paul say that the law brought death and a curse? that those who are under the law are under a curse? and that no one can be justified by the law? The reply is that the law is indeed a two-edged sword, bringing life to those who submissively receive it and who set their heart to obey it; but bringing death and condemnation and a curse to those who despise it, or who only profess respect for it with the lips while in their hearts they continue unchanged in their own ways. But precisely the same thing is true of the Gospel. For the ministry of the gospel, like that of the law, while a ministry of "life unto life" to all who with humility receive and submissively "obey the gospel," is likewise a "savour of death unto death" to all who refuse it, or neglect it, or who profess with the mouth, but continue unchanged at heart (2 Cor. 2:16). For the word of Christ is salvation and life to all who receive it; but concerning him that receive not His words He Himself has said: "The word that I have spoken" –the very word that was given for his salvation–"the same shall judge him at the last day" (John 12:48). Precisely so is it with the commandment of God; for in that very passage Christ declared that "His commandment is life everlasting"(v. 50).

Indeed, the consequences threatened to "them that obey not the gospel" are represented as being even more severe than those threatened to them who refused obedience to the law (2 Thess. 1:7-10) And in Hebrews 10:28,29 it is put this way: "If he that despised Moses' law died without mercy; –of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God"–etc.

Returning to Paul, we note that after saying that "the commandment was ordained unto life," he immediately adds that he "found it to be unto death" (Rom. 7:10). Why so? Because Paul was a Pharisee. He had been thoroughly indoctrinated into rabbinism, one of the cardinal doctrines of which was this very teaching as to the earthly and "Jewish" character of the Kingdom which has become the cornerstone of modern

dispensationalism. He had been schooled in a barren orthodoxy. He was “called a Jew,” and made his “boast of the law” (Rom. 2:17,18,23); but he had yet to learn that “He is not a Jew”—though “called a Jew” —“who is one outwardly,’ …but he is a Jew who is one inwardly” (vv. 28, 99). Of course to such it will be found that the law was “unto death”; and precisely so with the gospel. But all who were like Ezra, of whom it is recorded that he “prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it” (Ezra 7:7-10) have found that it was indeed “ordained unto life.” Paul clearly states the principle here involved when he says, “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully” (I Tim. 1:8). And the same is true of the gospel as well.

Then as regards the statement often heard in these days, that those who were under the law were under a curse, what Paul says is that “as many, as are of the works of the law are under the curse” (Gal. 3:10) which is quite another thing. For Paul is here remonstrating with those who were relying for their salvation upon the rites and ceremonies (the “works”) of the law, upon circumcision, keeping of days and the like. “A man,” he says, “is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16). So it was under the Law precisely as now under Grace. And it should not be necessary to say that a man can no more be saved by christian rites and observances (baptism, the Lord’s supper, keeping holy days etc.) than by those of Judaism. So the apostle declared in another place, saying, that “Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore?” (Was it because righteousness was unattainable by the law? Not at all; but) “Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law” (Rom. 11:7): and as we have seen from the word of Christ Himself, faith is one of “the weightier matters of the law”; and of course no amount of “the works of the law” will serve instead.

Continuing in Galatians, Paul asks whether they had received the Spirit “by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith” (3:2); and whether he himself, who had ministered to them the Spirit and had wrought miracles among them, had done it “by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith” (v. 5). And then he declares that—so far from what the dispensationalists teach as to there having been a complete change in the principles of God’s dealings with men—God acts now upon precisely the same principles as of old, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.” And adds as a corollary: “Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (v. 7).

This verse clearly identities those who are to inherit the promises made “to Abraham and his seed” (v. 16), and it completely rules out the natural descendants of Abraham. The last verse confirms this; for there we read, “And if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (v. 29). And this, as most impressively shown by the “allegory” in the next chapter, makes it evident that there remain no unfulfilled promises of blessing for the natural Jews as such. To this I hope to return.

Further in chapter Ill of Galatians, Paul takes up the question whether the law is against the promises of God” (v. 21). According to dispensational teaching the answer would be “yes.” For, as we have seen, the so-called “dispensation of promise,” which embraced the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and their descendants for several generations, terminated at Mt. Sinai where Israel “rashly accepted the law”; and thereupon a new dispensation (the law, with its ministry of condemnation, death and the curse, and with a character and ruling principles totally different) was inaugurated. Thus it is clearly the teaching of the Scofield Bible that the law is against the promises of God. But Paul rejects with indignation the idea that “the law” is in anywise

contrary to “the promises of God,” saying: “God forbid” (v. 21); and he goes on to show that the law had a great purpose to fulfill introductory to the coming of the One who was to accomplish eternal righteousness and to be the Fountain of eternal life to all the world. For he says: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster”; and what for? “to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (v. 24). And he adds: “But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (v. 25). So far, therefore, from speaking with disparagement of that divinely-given “schoolmaster,” or saying that his ministry was useless and worse, he shows that it was most necessary and important. It did not vacate the previously given promises. It did not introduce a new era characterized by contradictory principles; but “It was added” (to what God had previously done) “because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made” (v. 19).

And a further purpose of the law, in preparation for the gospel, was “that every mouth might be stopped, and ALL THE WORLD BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD” (Rom. 3:19).

Following further the teaching of Galatians, we find that the law as given from Mt. Sinai on tables of stone was suited to an immature stage of God’s dealings with the world (Gal. 4:1-4); and that the subsequent giving of the law into the hearts of a blood-washed people by the Holy Spirit (vs. 5-7) was the mark of the mature or adult stage of the same living person (so to speak). And from this we learn that the gospel, so far from being antagonistic to the law, sustains with respect thereto the same relation that the adult period of a man’s life bears to his childhood.

And in this connection, the pertinent lesson for our present purpose is that “the works of the law” against which Paul was warning the Galatians (the observing of “days and months, and times, and years,” (v. 10) and circumcision (5:2,6), belonged to the childhood stage of God’s dealings with His people. And it was for that reason that though they served useful purposes

for a certain period, they were to be laid aside as outgrown things, now that “the fulness of the time” was come (v. 4). As Paul said in another place: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (I Cor. 13:11) — not, be it noted, because they were detestable or reprehensible, but simply because they were outgrown, and would be a hindrance to the duties of manhood.

We see therefore, that the very passages that are used now-a-days to breed feelings of aversion toward the law of God, and to make it appear as something wholly antagonistic to the gospel, teach the very contrary; namely, that the law was a stage of the divine work preliminary to that of the gospel; or in other words, that the law and the gospel are complementary stages of one and the same great work of God.

For the truth in this regard is, as has been taught all through the christian centuries, that the law was a necessary part of God’s great plan of Redemption even as is the Gospel. And as an excellent specimen of what enlightened servants of Christ, men who were mighty in the Scriptures, had always taught concerning the relation of the Law to the Gospel (before dispensationalism was invented) I quote the following from Bernard’s celebrated work, The Progress of Doctrine.

“A principle that is contended for and secured (by Christ’s apostles in their teaching) is that the Gospel is the heir of the Law; that it inherits what the Law had prepared.

The Law, on its national and ceremonial side, had created a vast and closely woven system of ideas. These were wrought out and exhibited by it in forms according to the flesh—an elect nation, a miraculous history, a special covenant, a worldly sanctuary, a perpetual service, an anointed priesthood, a ceremonial sanctity, a scheme of sacrifice and atonement, a purchased possession, a holy city, a throne of David, a destiny of dominion. Were these ideas to be lost? and was the

language that expressed them to be dropped when the Gospel came? No! It was the heir of the Law. The Law had prepared these riches; and it now bequeathed them to a successor able to unlock and diffuse them. The Gospel claimed them all, and developed in them a value unknown before. It asserted itself as the proper and predestined continuation of the covenant made of God with the fathers, the real and only fulfilment of all that was typified and prophesied; presenting the same ideas which had been before embodied in the narrow but distinct limits of carnal forms in their spiritual, universal, and eternal character.

“The body of types according to the flesh died with Christ; and with Christ it arose again, a body of antitypes according to the Spirit. Those who were after the flesh could not recognize its identity; those who were after the Spirit realized and proclaimed it. The change was as great, the identity was as real, as in that mystery of the resurrection of the body which the same preachers showed; in which the earthly frame must lay aside the flesh and blood which cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, and must reappear; dead and raised again; another and yet the same; ‘sown in weakness and raised in power, sown in dishonor and raised in glory, sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body.'”