

THE
MORAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD;

WHEREIN IT IS SHOWN THAT
THE GENERAL EXHORTATIONS OF THE BIBLE
ARE NOT FOUNDED IN THE
PRINCIPLE OF MAN BEING IN A SALVABLE STATE,
BUT IN THE PRINCIPLE OF
MORAL AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY.

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"Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." James iv. 8.

"Sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." Jude 1.

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PREFACE.

TRUTH is the root of all that is good ; falsehood is the root of all that is evil. Falsehood branches out, producing evil in ten thousand ways ; truth branches out in all directions, producing real good. To reject falsehood, and receive the truth, is, to refuse the evil, and choose the good. One great error of the present day is, that because men are endued with physical, rational, and moral powers, and are responsible to God for the use they make of these powers—because they are thus endued, and are called upon to supremely regard their Maker, and to act according to the light given unto them—because men are thus constituted, and held responsible, it is by thousands concluded and asserted, that man is called upon to do something towards his own salvation, and thus make a *spiritual use* of mere natural powers. Without this doctrine of human power, they cannot account for the many scriptures which call upon men to repent, and do that which is lawful and right.

That the Word of God does call upon all men

to break off their sins by righteousness is clear, and it is also clear that men have capacity so to do, as far as mere natural religion is concerned ; but when natural powers pretend to a performance of something supernatural, they are then put in the place of the Holy Spirit.

The following pages are intended to show on what principle the exhortations of the Bible to the unregenerate are founded, and at what ends these exhortations aim ; also, to show the difference between the Lord's *natural* dominion, his *moral* government, and his new covenant kingdom. By his natural dominion is meant, that right which he has to dispose of all persons and things, as seemeth good in his sight. He has this right by virtue of what he is by nature, as being self-existent and independent of all, and all things being dependent upon him. This is his dominion, arising out of what he is by nature. This is his natural dominion.

His moral government is that wherein he judges men according to their works. This moral government extends to all that is *naturally* good, or naturally evil, in the conduct of men. It is as men stand in this moral government of God that they are commanded, as their duty, to do that which is lawful and right. It is a government distinct from that saving government of God, wherein grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

There may be at first some little difficulty in understanding the principles advocated in this work, but you must read on to the end, and after you have threaded your way through the several departments, you will at last, it is hoped, clearly understand the design. We do not doubt but the Bible is a book harmonious; and if, in searching the Scriptures, we are favoured to find out the principles upon which general exhortation is founded, we shall be furnished upon this point wherewith to answer those who reproach us. There is a *call* spoken of which men are reprovèd for not obeying. To open up the nature and design of this call is the chief business of this work. It is by the windows of truth that the light of heaven is let in upon us; and, as we love light, we like the windows to be clear from those hindrances which fallen angels and deluded men are ever throwing in the way, lest the light of the glory of God should shine into our hearts.

THE MORAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

Before we enter upon the subject, let us clearly understand what we are going about, what we are going to oppose, and what we are to establish. The matter then is this, to show that that doctrine which tells us that all men are called upon to accept salvation, is fallacious. This is the doctrine to be brought to nought. This doctrine is held, not only by the Roman Catholics and Wesleyans, but also by many thousands who profess to believe in eternal election. These contend that Christ died *savingly* for the elect, and *conditionally* for the rest; that the elect are sure to be saved, and the rest may if they will; and that therefore all men are called upon to accept salvation. This is the doctrine which is in this book to be opposed. We shall oppose this doctrine, as held by professed Calvinists; these approach nearest the truth, and are therefore the most cunning and dangerous of our foes. Now,

mind, we are not going to speak persecutingly, nor even disrespectfully, of any men, or sect of men; our object is, to let truth speak for itself. The doctrine, then, to be opposed, is that which says all men are in a salvable state.

The next thing is, by what means, by what principle is this doctrine to be brought to nought. Let us here get a clear view of the main principle upon which we are to work, and the means we are to employ; then we shall go on comfortably, and free from confusion. The principle upon which we are to work is this, that the Word of God calls upon all men to act according to the light which they possess; that every man is endowed with certain natural powers, and that he is responsible to God for the use of these powers. Mark the three different positions in which men are held by the Scriptures. 1st. As dead in sin by the fall: in this position judgment is passed upon all men. We shall see that the Scriptures nowhere call upon men to do anything towards helping themselves out of this state, because such calls would be utterly useless. In this state men are fixed; none but Omnipotence can deliver. Now, notice another position, namely, completeness in Christ. The Scriptures do not call upon men to do anything towards salvation; for salvation, and all that accompanies salvation, are the gift of God. And now comes the position in which all men are called upon to supremely regard their

Maker. This call is founded in that individual responsibility to God, in which every man stands. Every man *feels* that he ought supremely to regard his Maker; he *feels* that he knows right from wrong, as far as natural right and wrong go; he *feels* that he *wilfully* follows the wrong; he *feels* that there is a quietude of mind to be found in right, which cannot be found in wrong. Thus men are each held responsible for their *personal* works. Man standing in this position of individual responsibility, and possessing natural powers, he is called upon to act according to the light given him.

When the Scriptures address men in this position of individual responsibility, they leave it to the creature to employ his natural powers or not, to choose or refuse, to obey or disobey; but when the Scriptures address men as objects of special love and eternal redemption, the matter is not left with the creature, neither in whole nor in part. "Follow me," comes with invincible power, and as soon as his people hear, they obey, being "made willing in the day of his power." But when men are addressed, not for saving but for moral purposes, and turn a deaf ear, they are justly blamed for their obstinacy, as they are called to leave what they know is wrong, and to follow that which they know is right; but when the conscience is hardened by a course of sin, the chains

are riveted, and they are given up to vile affections, and thus become unable to do what they once had power to do. But this does not affect the main principle upon which we have to work. Let it then be understood, that men are by the Scriptures addressed in their moral capacity, and are called upon to do that for which their natural powers are suited. Now mind, they are not addressed as having fallen in Adam; that is, they are not called upon to alter their standing in him, nor are they addressed as standing in Christ, nor are they blamed for being lost, nor are they reproved for not having an interest in Christ; but they are blamed for wilfully acting contrary to the light which they have. This principle of individual responsibility will account for those Scriptures, parables, and circumstances which *seemingly* stand opposed to the freeness and fulness of that grace by which alone a sinner can be saved. Now then, bring the two opposing principles together, and let us see which is to gain the mastery, and for this mastery let them strive lawfully. The two principles are these: one says, that all men, being in a salvable state, are called upon to accept salvation, and are blamed for not being saved; the other principle says, that all men, being responsible to their Maker, are called upon to act according to the light they have, and are blamed for doing that which they know to be wrong.

Our business now is, to prove that the latter principle is right, and that, therefore, the other must be wrong.

Now then, we see *what* is to be done, but *how* are we to go to work? Let us make the *manner*, the *how*, as well as the *matter*, quite clear. We hope, then, to go on with *clear* heads and *warm* hearts. The manner, then, is to be this: first, to show that although the law of God *has* changed in the *letter* of it, yet that it is *unchangeable* in the *spirit* of it. That all men are under this law; that the law bears a two-fold relation to man, federal and personal; that in this second relation of the law, man is called upon supremely to regard his Maker; that it is the duty of all men to obey this call; that it is a call not to salvation, but to natural obedience, as far as they know right from wrong; that the ends to be answered are reformation and mitigation of future punishment. When we have made clear personal responsibility, and the ends the Scriptures have in view in exhorting the ungodly; when we have made these points clear, we shall then show that the unregenerate are not called upon to do that which they have no capacity for. The regenerated are called upon to do what the unregenerate cannot do. The truth of this will appear in its place. When we get thus far on with our subject, we shall have nothing to do but just to contrast the two principles; the one which sup-

poses man in a salvable state, and is therefore called upon to accept salvation; the other principle, which supposes man not in a salvable state, but endued with natural powers, for the use of which he is responsible to God, and is therefore called upon to supremely regard his Maker. In this contrast we shall see the absurdity of the former, and the truth of the latter. Falsehood is destructive; truth is saving.

There are in the ten commandments what are called the two tables of the law. The first four commandments show our responsibility to God. The first shows the unity and supremacy of God; "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The second shows his exclusive right to homage, honour, and worship. The third shows the reverence with which his name is to be used: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The fourth shows the times of labour and of worship; "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." These four commandments are called the first table of the law, because they relate to our duty towards God. The remaining six are called the second table of the law, because they relate to our duty to one another in the several relations of life. This law, that is to say, these ten commandments, show our responsibility to God and to one another. The same things are set forth throughout the Bible. The Bible is a book perfectly harmonious, and no one law contained therein is

abolished otherwise than provisionally, for the import and spirit of both law and gospel are the same through all the changes of external dispensations. The ceremonial law is abolished, but its import still continues in those good things of which the ceremonial law was a shadow. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, and he for his people hath removed its curse; but then he has not thus gone to the end of the law, and removed its curse, by making void the law, but by fulfilling it, and enduring its curse. And now let us find out the import of the law, and we shall see that the law in its import still continues, and has never in its spirit and import undergone any alteration. What was the import of the law given to Adam but that which we have in the first commandment, "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." This implies all that was implied in the law given to Adam, and this first commandment includes all the rest. The import of the law, then, is Jehovah's supremacy, his right to command, the creature's duty to obey. Jehovah's right to command can never cease; therefore the import of the law can never cease, but the relative position of creatures may be altered. Fallen angels before they fell stood in a position of conformity to the supremacy and sovereignty of God; but now they are in a state of enmity to his supremacy and sovereignty; they fought against his supremacy and sovereignty in the garden of Eden, saying to

the creatures, "Ye shall be as gods;" and as the supremacy and sovereignty of God shine with more than tenfold brightness in the salvation of the church, here men and devils fight against his sovereignty with more than tenfold fury. Adam and Eve stood, before the fall, in conformity to his supremacy and sovereignty; his supremacy in giving a law, his sovereignty in giving them that kind of law which seemed good in his sight, without at all consulting Adam as to what kind of a law he should be under. God made man upright, and man stood in conformity to, and was happy in the supremacy and sovereignty of God; but the fall altered not the law of God in the spirit of it, for the supremacy and sovereignty of God continued the same. But our position was altered; we passed from conformity to deformity, from acquiescence to opposition; and thus the carnal mind is enmity against the sovereignty of God. The law of God may be said, in the letter of it, to have undergone several changes. The command to Adam was, that he was to abstain from the tree of knowledge of good and evil; he was no longer under this command. Again, we do not know what the letter of the law was which was possessed from Adam to Moses. The law given by Moses enjoined the observance of the seventh day of the week, but the apostles kept the first day, and, of course, we follow them, and keep the first day of the week. Thus the law, in the letter of

it, has undergone several changes, but, in the spirit of it, no change can ever take place. The supremacy and sovereignty of God are the spirit of the law; he always was and always will be supreme; he always did and always will possess sovereign right to do what he will with his own; therefore men in all ages are under divine supremacy and sovereignty. Men may fight against his supremacy and sovereignty, but still they are under that supremacy and sovereignty. Here we were *before* the fall, here we are after the fall, and here are all who are in Christ. From these lofty perfections, both law and gospel derive their stability. Before one jot or tittle of the import of the law can fail, or one word of the gospel can fall to the ground, Jehovah must cease to be sovereign and supreme.

If, then, divine supremacy and sovereignty be the spirit of the law, the letter of it is of minor importance. Creation shows his supremacy, and every man feels it is his duty to supremely regard the Most High. Whether this voice sound out through the things of creation, or through the written word, the claim is the same, in the nature of it. The duty of the creature, as to the nature of that duty, is the same.

The Lord's people, as they stand in Christ, are in a state of entire, eternal, and infallible conformity to the supremacy and sovereignty of God,

for where does sovereign dominion shine forth as it does in salvation? By the great work of Christ, his supremacy and sovereignty are not made void, obscured, or tarnished, but established, shine forth, and are honoured; and by Christ Jesus we worship God and walk with God in complete accordance with his supremacy and sovereignty. Nor is there any other way in which to be conformed to the import of the law of God; so that the people who charged Paul with persuading men to worship God *contrary* to the law were most sadly mistaken. "Yea," saith the apostle, "we establish the law; we, in introducing the work of Christ, maintain the supremacy, sovereignty, holiness, and justice of God." This is the way in which he is a *just* God and a *Saviour*. Thus the import of the law remains the same through all the changes of external dispensations, as well as through all the different positions in which man may stand relative to the law. Three different positions we have seen: first, before the fall, in which state Adam stood in conformity to the law, but his standing was conditional: second, the position in which men stand in the fall, which is a state of guilt and enmity: third, the position in which the Lord's people stand in their oneness with Christ. This deliverance from the *bondage* and curse of the law is unloseable.

The sentence of death is passed upon all men

in Adam, and the sentence of mercy is passed upon all the true Israel of God. We have here to do with man, not in his federal union to Adam, nor yet in union to Christ, but in his personal responsibility as far as his natural powers go. It is in this natural and moral capacity of man that he is addressed in the word of God, and it is for the good or bad use of his natural powers that he is responsible to God. Let this be made clear, then all those scriptures which men cannot account for without concluding that all are in a salvable state, will come in natural, plain, and clear; for if we know not by what law man is responsible, we cannot know how far or for what he is responsible. If a man be not under a law, he cannot be said to violate that law. Now whatever be the *letter* of the law under which all men are, this one thing is certain, that all have sinned, and come short of conformity and submission to the first commandment, for they have, in passing through this world, chosen ten thousand things rather than God. But we shall carry our subject farther back than this presently. Suffice it here to observe, that the whole world is guilty before God; and here comes the question, of what is the *whole* world guilty? Now let this question be answered by the *import* of the law, and the whole comes in, the savage as well as the civilized; for the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are *clearly seen*, being understood by

the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead, his headship, as the Creator, his supremacy and sovereignty. Now, then, what saith the first commandment? "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And what saith creation? why, that the Creator is the rightful object of *supreme* regard. What have they done who have had (the letter of) the law? and what have the heathen done, who have not had (the letter of) the law? Why, they have *all* chosen their own ways, and followed the devices of their own hearts. All have sinned, and come short of the rightful claims of the Most High. It is not the letter so much as the clear import of the law, at which we are to look. The violating of the law consists in preferring ourselves to our Maker. Tried by this law, who could plead not guilty? And here we must not lose sight of our *natural* and *federal* union to Adam. By our natural descent from him, we are corrupt in our nature, and by our federal union to him, the guilt of this corruption of nature brings us under sentence of death; so that death passes upon all, infants not excepted. Thus, it is clear that all have sinned, that all are corrupt, that all are under sentence of death, and all are responsible to God. Now, then, as we have seen by what law and in what relation all have sinned and are under sentence of death, let us here ask how far they are responsible to God; what will God require at their hands? This is a plain ques-

tion, to which let a plain answer be given; for although, as before shown, we are in a state of condemnation by nature, yet we are assured that every one shall be rewarded according to his works. It therefore appears to me that the extent of our responsibility depends upon what we *ought* to know. I give this definition because ignorance in many instances is *criminal*. Hence, the heathen *ought* to know that there is a Supreme Being, who is the author of creation, and ought to be supremely regarded. I should not venture such an assertion as this were it not that the word of God is decisive upon the point. It is thus written; "That which *may be* known of God is manifest in them, viz., the things of creation; for God hath showed his supremacy, his eternal power and godhead, but they did not like to retain God in their knowledge." (Rom. i.) Here, then, is the rule. They knew, or ought to have known, enough of God to let them see that he alone ought to have been worshipped. Again; the children of Israel ought to have attended more to the laws and statutes delivered unto them, so that they might have been more familiar with the ways and wonders of the Lord. Hence they were commanded to teach them to their children, that they might walk in the ways of the Lord; but instead of this, they neglected the law of the Lord, while the lips even of the priests ceased to keep knowledge, and perverted the law of the Lord.