

THE
LAW OF FAITH
OPPOSED TO THE
LAW OF WORKS.
IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.
OCCASIONED BY
A CIRCULAR LETTER,
(WHICH IS NOW SUBJOINED)

Published by the ELDERS and MESSENGERS of several BAPTIST
CHURCHES; being met in ASSOCIATION at AULCESTER, in
WARWICKSHIRE, on the 6th and 7th of JUNE, 1786.

SECOND EDITION

WITH
A P R E F A C E
INTENDED AS
A SHORT REPLY TO

Mr. JOSHUA THOMAS,

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LONDON

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR:

And sold by J. MATHEWS, N^o 18, Strand; G. TERRY, Paternoster-row; J. S. JORDAN, N^o
166, Fleet-Street; and —LUCAS, Market-place, Birmingham.

M D C C X C I.

ADVERTISEMENT.

As by the Circular Letter, published by the Elders and Messengers of several Baptist churches, at their late Association, holden at Alcester, in the county of Warwick, on the 6th and 7th days of June, 1786, I find myself branded with the opprobrious name of Antinomian, as denying the law to be a rule of life or conduct to a believer; therefore, in vindication of myself, and I may say of the truth itself, I have consented to the publication of the following Letter, wherein my objections to that phrase are stated, and my leading sentiments are avowed.

P R E F A C E.

HAVING been requested to publish a second edition of a letter, entitled “The Law of Faith opposed to the Law of Works,” I shall take this opportunity of making a short reply to Mr. *Joshua Thomas’s* Remarks.

I do not mean to take notice of Mr. *Thomas’s* personal abuse, and contemptuous sneers, which make up the most considerable part of his remarks; but, as he drew them up by way of amusement (for so he tells us in his advertisement), I wish to answer them with the strictest regard to truths and in the fear of God.

In order that every impartial reader may be satisfied, whether I have or have not misrepresented or misquoted the circular letter published by the Baptist Association at Aulcester, I have, to this edition of my letter, subjoined that circular letter at full length.

In this reply I only mean to state, plainly and simply, the ground of the controversy; and to explain my meaning where I conceive it to have been misrepresented or misunderstood. I do not mean to follow

Mr. *Thomas* in all his windings, and twistings, and shiftings, and turnings, and quibblings, and cavilings, by which he. artfully endeavours to cover the true meaning of their letter, and to divert the attention of the reader from the main point.

In June 1786 a circular letter was published by an Association of Ministers and Messengers from several Baptist churches, which was holden at Aulcester in Warwickshire; signed by *Joshua Thomas*, Moderator; written (as I have been informed) by Mr. *Spencer*, who at that time was minister of the Baptist Church at Aulcester. The doctrines contained in this letter appeared to me directly contrary to the doctrines which the Association, in the title page of their letter, professed to hold: but that which particularly engaged my attention was the description given of an Antinomian, and of Antinomianism. The circular letter says, “Antinomianism is that doctrine which opposes the authority of the moral law, considered as a rule of conduct: and an Antinomian is one who denies that believers are under obligation to obey the moral law.”

As my sentiments upon that subject were very well known in the neighbourhood of Birmingham; as I had been represented by some of the ministers¹ who composed that Association as an Antinomian, a bad man, and a dangerous character; I did then, and do now, consider myself as personally alluded to: but, whether I was or was not, does not in the least affect the main question; which is this.—Is that doctrine, which, opposes the authority of the moral law, considered

¹ I shall mention the names of two Baptist ministers, members of that Association, who have made free with my character. The first is Mr. *Taylor*; who, at the time when the letter was published from Aulcester, was minister of the Baptist church, Cannon-Street, Birmingham; and who, at my first coming to reside at Birmingham, endeavoured to prevent several persons from coming to hear me; by representing me as a *bad man*. Mr. *Taylor* acknowledged this to be true at my own house; but said he only meant that I was a man who held bad principles. Mr. *Spencer*, the author of the circular letter, has given my character in these words “I believe there is never a devil in hell who holds worse sentiments than Mr. *Bradford* does.” This

character I have now by me in Mr. *Spencer's* own handwriting. As it respects both Mr. *Taylor* and Mr. *Spencer*, I can truly say. that I consider them as more honest men *now*, in publicly avowing their real sentiments, and renouncing the Calvinistic doctrines, than when they pretended to hold doctrines which they did not believe.

For my own part, I was fully Satisfied that Mr. *Taylor* was an Arminian long before he joined Mr. *Wesley*; and, as to the Baptist Circular Letter, I ever did; and do now, consider it as Deism artfully disguised. The author of that letter has now avowed the Socinian principles. I will therefore leave it for others to draw the line between Socinianism and Deism.

as a rule of conduct, Antinomianism, or not?— Is every one, who denies that believers are under obligation to obey the moral law, to be considered as an Antinomian, or not? What the Baptist Association affirms, I do as positively deny.

In my letter, entitled. “The Law of Faith,” I stated my objections to the phrase in the following manner.

First, I endeavoured to prove that the law was not given upon supposition that man could keep it.

Secondly, I endeavoured to shew that the believer was absolutely and entirely delivered from the law.

Thirdly, I endeavoured to answer the leading objections generally made to that doctrine. which holds that the believer is absolutely and entirely delivered from the law.

Fourthly, I endeavoured to shew what it is to be under the law, and what it is to be delivered from the law.

I leave it for others to judge concerning what I have advanced upon these four particulars, and shall only say that I am more and more confirmed in my opinion that the moral law of ten commandments cannot properly be called a rule of conduct to a believer, and that a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ cannot properly be said to be under the authority of the moral law; on the contrary, that the *whole* will of God, and not a *part* of his will, is the believer’s rule; and that true obedience can arise only from *faith* and *love*.

Mr. *Thomas* says (page 19 of his remarks) “The moral law, as above defined, includes every word of God that is of a preceptive nature, even advice, direction, warning, &c. and all in the preceptive form, such as *believe*, *obey*, *repent*.” Again, he says (page 20), “The moral law, in ours, includes every thing of a preceptive nature, be it called *law* or *gospel*.” What confounding law and gospel is this? Here we see the real principles of Messrs. *Thomas* and Co. And sure I am that these are truly *Antinomian principles*; for who is an Antinomian but

he who is against the law? and who can be more against law than he who puts it to a wrong use? The law is good if a man use it *lawfully*: but I must say that he who uses it *unlawfully* is properly an Antinomian. Let me ask, Where does the moral law require me to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?—How does it appear that the moral law requires me to repent? The law is so far from requiring me to repent, that it leaves no room for repentance: the law is so far from requiring me to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that (as Doctor *Watts* says) to *convince* and to *condemn* is all the law can do.

I would now explain my meaning in two particulars; in which I conceive I have been misrepresented by some, and misunderstood by others.

It has been said that (in page 27 of my letter) I have entirely set aside the written word, by saying —“If led by the Spirit of God, ye are not under the law; for the Spirit surely is a sufficient guide, without any other direction or assistance.” My meaning is,—that the Spirit is sufficient *to guide* and *direct* us into the knowledge of God’s will, and to *assist* us in doing his will, even though delivered from the authority of the law. It cannot *fairly* be supposed that I meant to set aside the written word, when, but a few lines before, I proposed this phrase —“The scriptures the rule of faith and practice,” as being preferable, because less objectionable, than the phrase so much contended for—“The law a rule of life to a believer.” I am so far from wishing to set aside the written word, that, from my heart, I do receive and acknowledge it to be the standard of truth.

I wish likewise to explain my meaning in what I have said respecting the works by which Abraham and Rahab are said to be justified. I have said that they were not justified by their personal obedience to the moral law, but by the obedience of faith; which, in my letter, I called the work or act of faith. Pray (says Mr. *Thomas*, page 11 of his Remarks), is not the act of faith, faith itself? I might ask, with equal propriety, is not the effect the cause? Is not the fruit the root? Though

Mr. *Thomas* may see no difference between law and gospel, between obedience to the law and the obedience of faith, yet, for my own part, I can see a very great difference; and I hope to make it appear in a sermon I am going to publish on the nature and necessity of obedience. I believe that Abraham, in that act of obedience by which he offered up his son, looked far beyond the moral law. He saw, *by the law*, that Isaac's life was justly forfeited; but, *by faith*, he rested on the promise, and was persuaded that God was able to raise up his son even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure.

This is what I mean by Abraham and Rahab being justified, not by their personal obedience to the law; for they looked far beyond the law; but by the act or work of faith, *i. e.* by the obedience of faith, resting upon the promises of God, and looking for the accomplishment of those promises in due time.

I do not expect that any thing I have said will have the least influence upon those who triumph and exult in such evasion and falsehood as runs throughout the whole of Mr. *Thomas*' remarks; of which I will give but one instance, and conclude.

Mr. *Thomas* (in page 15 of his remarks) charges me with referring that to the present time which, he says, was intended by them to refer to the time before the fall. Let the impartial reader look at page 8 of the Baptist Circular Letter, and judge between us, whether reference is not made to the present time, at least in the latter part of the paragraph; which runs thus—"Do we, by the righteousness of Christ, personally honour God?—Do we, by that righteousness, experience the exalted pleasures found in the practice of holiness—*Doth* the Righteousness of the Redeemer capacitate for communion with God?—Is it by that we enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, and the delightful sense of the approbation of Jehovah?—Surely not—The righteousness of Christ, not answering these important purposes, can never supply the place of our own personal obedience to the moral law; by which alone these ends can be answered." If *do* and *doth*

should be considered as referring to the present time, I will leave others to fix what name they please to Mr. *Joshua Thomas* ' Remarks.

I will assure the reader that, in the second edition, I have not taken the liberty of altering one jot or tittle.

I N T R O D U C T I O N.

TRUTH can never suffer by a free enquiry; for that will stand when every thing else shall fall. The things which can be shaken shall be removed, but those things which cannot be shaken will remain.

Amidst the variety of sentiments which prevail in this day, the Christian knows that the foundation standeth sure; because his faith is not merely an agent of the understanding, but a saving discovery of Christ, made to his soul by the Spirit of God, whereby he is enabled to *apprehend that for which he also was apprehended*; so that, the truth of St. Paul's definition of faith (*that it is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*) is known and felt in his soul's experience; *his faith does not stand upon the wisdom of man, but on the power of God.*

The apostle speaks of some who are *ever learning, never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*. Wretched existence! dreadful uncertainty! What! is this religion to be always perplexed with doubts and fears? to be always in suspense as to the true state of the soul? If this is religion, then it may well be charged with making our lives truly miserable.

An assured knowledge of salvation, by the remission of sins, is a doctrine not understood by men in general; therefore, it is no wonder that, as an article of faith, it should be generally rejected, and its

advocates despised as designing knaves, credulous fools, or mad-brained enthusiasts. This treatment is expected from the world in general, for those, who now bear the clearest and boldest testimony for Jesus, and his power to save, were formerly the most violent opposers of this truth: for my own part, I can say, with St. Paul, that I preach that faith which I once destroyed. But pretended friends are allowed to be the greatest enemies. Many, who are esteemed gospel preachers, are, nevertheless, the greatest enemies to the doctrines of free grace, and justification by faith alone; for, though they profess to hold these doctrines, yet, at the same time, they hold sentiments contrary to them. These men will not deny but the knowledge of salvation is attainable, yet they say it is rarely attained, it is by no means essential to faith; and frequently insinuate, that a doubting Christian is generally the best. I once heard this sentiment advanced, “he who doubts most has least room to doubt.” Which is as much as to say, that the greatest unbeliever is in the safest state.

In respect to the Circular Letter (my sentiments of which are given in the following letter) I must observe, in the first place, that it seems calculated to lead the mind astray from the truth, as revealed in the Scriptures, because there is not one single text of scripture brought in proof of their assertions, which are to be established upon *solid argument*. And, in the second place, they attempt to prejudice the minds of their readers against all who do not approve of that particular term or phrase, the law a rule of life or conduct to a believer, by branding them with the name of Antinomians. But if truth be the object, let party prejudices and personal attachments be laid aside; to the law and to the testimony; if any man speaks not agreeable to this, it is because there is no light in him. If the scriptures are the unerring standard, on which God has stamped his own authority, then we appeal to these. Let the authority of synods, councils, assemblies, ministers and messengers, give place to the name and authority of him who is God over all, blessed for evermore.

As malicious reports, and most abominable falsehoods, have been industriously propagated, representing me as preaching doctrines which lead to licentiousness, I do most solemnly declare, as God is my witness, that I do from my heart abhor, detest, and abjure the licentious tenets charged upon me, and do now publicly declare, that the reports industriously propagated, are base, malicious, and groundless falsehoods. And, that the doctrines which I preach, so far from having any tendency to licentiousness, are the only doctrines calculated to restrain from that which is evil, and constrain to that which is good. Because, no man can live to God till he is dead to the law, as St. Paul says, *wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ that ye should be married so another, and bring forth fruit unto God,*¹ *for the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly, in this present world.*²

How far the following publication may answer the end of removing prejudices, the event only must determine; but if this letter should fall into the hands of any who have hitherto submitted to the judgment of others, I only beg that they would read and judge for themselves; for do our laws condemn any man before he has been heard? It is an act of injustice and cruelty to listen to evil surmises, and propagate malicious reports against any man with whom you are unacquainted; neither knowing his doctrine, purpose, principles, nor manner of life, only as you have been informed by his enemies. But as these pretend to so much zeal for the law, it may perhaps be supposed that they must necessarily be good men, who would not be guilty of a willful lie, nor live in the willful and allowed violation of any known precept; but St. Paul, addressed himself to those who likewise boasted of the Law, when he said, *thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God;*³ for neither do they keep the law

¹ Rom. 8. 4.

² Titus 2. 12.

³ Rom. 2. 23.

themselves, who contend so earnestly about the law, but desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, and to be thought holy, just, and good,

Our Lord says, that there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and they shall deceive many; and he describes them as *wolves in sheep's clothing*, who, under the malice of outward sanctity, whilst they are pleading for the law, effectually undermine the gospel of our salvation: for I will venture to affirm, that if the law is to be established as a rule to a believer, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is effectually overturned, and a wide door is opened to all the errors which our forefathers opposed in the church of Rome.

The law and the curse, the gospel and the blessing, are inseparably connected. If the believer is under the law, he is under the curse; *for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.*¹ If the believer is under the curse, wherein does he differ from an unbeliever? or how shall we distinguish between a believer, and an unbeliever? If our acceptance with God depends upon our own personal obedience to the moral law, I am sure no man living can be justified; if our own personal obedience to the moral law is to be the evidence of faith, then no man ever had faith, for no man was ever able, for a single hour, to obey and keep the law.

The Baptists have affirmed, in their Circular Letter, “That man has a capacity of being governed by the law—that he is a *free agent*—that he has *rationality*, whereby he can know the difference between moral good and evil—that a believer is under an obligation to fulfil the law.” All this I deny, and the sentiments I abhor, and as they have attempted to prove these assertions by *solid argument*, as the Lord shall enable and assist me, I would endeavour to prove the contrary by *solid scripture*; for I read, that *the wisdom which is from beneath is earthly, sensual, and devilish*; therefore, a Christian can receive no argument, however fair and plausible it may appear, if he has not scripture proof.

¹ Gal. iii. 10.

He knows that the devil is skilled in argument, and so are his ministers. He knows that the devil can transform himself into an angel of light, and so can his ministers.

It must be confessed that the Baptists, in their Letter, have uttered great swelling words; if they do really stand possessed of those powers whereof they boast, they have whereof to glory, and may well look down, conscious of worth, with an air of superiority and sovereign contempt upon those who feel the plague of their own hearts, and deny their own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, to glory only in the Lord. *God forbid*, says St. Paul, that *I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*. But as to these Baptists, if we may be allowed to judge by the obvious meaning of words, the language of their hearts is this—"You, whom we are pleased to call Antinomians, by the force of your pernicious principles, will some time or other be drawn into sin; but we have a power to keep ourselves from sin. We have *rationality* and *free agency*, by which we have a power not only of being governed by the law, but even of fulfilling the law." *The little horn*, spoken of by the Prophet Daniel, and by St. John, in the Revelations, *had a mouth speaking great things*.

It may be asked, whether they were not gracious men and experienced ministers, by order of whom this letter was signed, and in whose name it was published? Whether the churches represented in that association were not sound in the faith? Whether they do not profess, in their title-page, to hold the doctrines of eternal and personal election, original sin, particular redemption, free justification by the righteousness of Christ imputed, efficacious grace in regeneration, and the final perseverance of the saints?

I answer, the private character of an individual does not prove a doctrine to be true or false. As to the doctrines which these churches once held, or which they now profess to hold, if the sentiments contained in the Letter are subversive of those doctrines, it must render the sentiments so much the more dangerous; because simple

minds may not perceive their pernicious tendency. If a paper of powdered arsenic should be laid upon the table, with an inscription calling it powdered sugar candy, there would be more danger of some person eating of it, than if the inscription gave us to understand that poison was wrapped up in that paper.

As my real intention in consenting to this publication, is to detect error, and to declare my real and avowed sentiments, the friends of truth will easily overlook the plainness of the language. As to my enemies, I expect no quarter from them, for I can truly say that they have hitherto stuck at nothing to ruin my character; thanks be to God, I am enabled to testify of the deeds of the flesh that they are evil, and that there is no other name under heaven given unto men, whereby they can be saved from sin, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If it be Antinomianism to say that God has no pleasure in wickedness, that all unrighteousness is sin, and that without holiness no man can see the Lord; in that case I am an Antinomian. Does it follow, that our Lord encouraged licentiousness in others, or allowed it in himself, because he was called by Pharisees the friend of sinners? Does it follow, that the doctrines charged with Antinomianism have a tendency to licentiousness, because upbraided as such by those who know as little of the power of divine grace, as they do of the treachery of their own hearts? How affectionately does St. Paul expostulate with the Galatians on this very point. *“At first (says he) you received me as an angel of light, and I bear you record, that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes to have given them to me; am I, therefore, become your enemy because I tell you the truth. They zealously affect you, but not well; i. e. certain judaizing teachers (who crept into the churches of Galatia, teaching that they ought to be circumcised and keep the law) so prejudiced the churches against St. Paul, that they would not hear him; for he complains, in his epistle to*

Timothy, *all they of Asia are turned away from me.*¹

No wonder if those who preach the same doctrines meet with the same treatment: no wonder if those who publicly avow the sentiments contained in the Baptist Circular Letter, should say all manner of evil against those who maintain the contrary.

¹ 2 Tim. 1. 15.

Sensible of my own weakness, yet relying upon him who has promised to be mouth and wisdom to his people, I rest assured that God will not suffer his own truths to be materially injured by the weakness of his poor servant, who looks up to him for direction and assistance, for wisdom and spiritual understanding. My heart's desire and prayer to God is, that the Spirit of truth may lead us into all truths. If I speak evil, bear witness of the evil, but if right, whosoever he be that smiteth me, he shall bear his own judgment. Nevertheless, God forbid that I should cease to pray for them that despitefully use, and persecute me: being ready to give an answer to every one that shall ask me a reason of the hope that is in me, with meekness and fear.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IN compliance with your request, I send you my freest thoughts of the sentiments contained in the Circular Letter, published by the ministers and messengers of several Baptist churches, at their late association, holden at Aulcester, in the county of Warwick, on the 6th and 7th days of June, 1786.

I trust that, from the errors maintained and avowed in that Letter, you will see the necessity of opposing that particular term or phrase, "*The law a rule of life or conduct to a believer;*" as I doubt not but I shall be able to make it appear to your fullest satisfaction, that the arguments, by which the Baptists, in their Letter, attempt to prove the law to be a rule to a believer, are contrary, not only to scripture, but to the doctrines avowed in the title-page of the letter, such as "*eternal and personal election, original sin, particular redemption, free justification by the righteousness of Christ imputed.*" To me it seems

impossible to reconcile man's free agency with eternal and personal election, and particular redemption; or man's capacity to obey and keep the law with original sin; or man's personal righteousness, with free justification by the righteousness of Christ imputed. It is positively and expressly affirmed in the Baptist Letter, that man has a capacity of being governed by, and obeying the law, as being a rational creature, a free agent, and as having free will! for, say they, *"if man were not a free agent, but acted from invincible foreign agency, against his will, certainly there would be neither sin nor holiness in his actions."*

These are the grounds upon which the law is to be established as a rule; rationality, free agency, free will, and man's capacity to obey the law." *To cite passage of scripture, to prove assertions (they say) is to upbraid their readers with egregious ignorance of the New Testament.*" Therefore, without bringing one single text of scripture, to prove such important points of doctrine, the believer is laid **"UNDER AN OBLIGATION TO FULFIL THE LAW."** Surely they must have drunk deep of the golden cup full of abominations, who can say that fallen man can obey and keep, yea, FULFIL the law; these are the drunkards of Ephraim, who are spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, ch. 28, *who are swallowed up of wine, and are out of the way through strong drink, who err in vision and stumble in judgment, to whom the Lord says, this is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing, yet they would not bear. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little, that they might go and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.* For by their own words, such must stand condemned who can adopt the language contained in the Baptist Letter, "By OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS we personally honour our Maker; we experience the exalted pleasures found in the practice of holiness; we enjoy communion with God, the testimony of a good conscience, and a delightful sense of the

approbation of Jehovah: Do we, by the righteousness of Christ, personally honour God? Do we by that, righteousness experience the exalted pleasures found in the practice of holiness? Doth the righteousness of the Redeemer capacitate for communion with God? Is it by that we enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, and the delightful sense of the approbation of Jehovah? Surely not, the righteousness of Christ not answering these important purposes, can never supply the place of our own personal obedience to the moral law, by which ALONE these ends can be answered.”

May the Lord ever keep me faithful to oppose such blasphemous sentiments as these, and detect such damnable heresies, which have a tendency to destroy the very foundations of our faith. I am happy, therefore, that you have given me an opportunity of stating my objections to that particular phrase, so much insisted upon, “The law a rule of life or conduct to a believer;” which I propose to do in the following manner s

First, I would endeavour to prove that the law was not given upon supposition that man could keep it.

Secondly, I would endeavour to shew, that the believer is absolutely and entirely delivered from the law.

Thirdly, I would answer the leading objections generally made to that doctrine, which holds, that the believer is absolutely and. entirely delivered from the law,

Fourthly, I would shew what it is to be under the law, and what it is to be delivered from the law.

First, I am to prove that the law was not given upon supposition that man could keep it. .

It is admitted in the Baptist Letter, that *it would be absurd to say that the law was a rule, if man had not a capacity of keeping it*: they say, man has this capacity, and it lies upon me to prove, that man has not this capacity. The whole dispute seems to turn upon this very

point; I am thankful, therefore, that the scriptures speak so positively and expressly to it, it is said, *The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.*¹ Again, St. Paul says, *I consent to the law that it is good, but how to perform that which is good I find not.*² In another place he says, *The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.*³ If man is not subject to the law of God, what becomes of his capacity, and of being governed by it? If St. Paul found not how to perform that which was good, where was his power to keep the law? If the law is spiritual, reaching to the inmost thoughts and intentions of the heart, how can it be fulfilled by one, the imaginations of whose heart are only evil, and that continually?

In answer to this, it is generally asked, why was the law given, if man could not keep it? I bless God, that this question too has been answered by an inspired apostle, *wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions;*⁴ i. e. to shew man that he is really a transgressor. Many passages might be brought to prove, that the law was not given upon supposition that man *could* keep it, but in order to shew him that he could *not* keep it. *By the law is the knowledge of sin;*⁵ *it discovers the exceeding sinfulness of sin;*⁶ *concludes all under sin;*⁷ *that every mouth might be stopped, and the whole world might become guilty before God.*⁸

Are we children of transgression? Are we conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity? Are we by nature children of wrath? If we are, then nothing can be conceived more absurd than to suppose, that man should be possessed of a power of keeping that law, under which he lies a condemned criminal, waiting the execution of the sentence already passed upon him; for, *by the offence of one, judgment came*

¹ Rom. 8. 7.

² Rom. 7. 16.

³ Rom. 7. 14.

⁴ Rom. 3. 19.

⁵ Rom. 3. 20.

⁶ Rom. 7. 13.

⁷ Gal. 3. 22,

⁸ Rom. 3. 19.

*upon all men to condemnation;*¹ and our Lord says, *be that believeth not is condemned already.*² As condemned criminals, then, we are bound to suffer the punishment which the law requires.

It is certain that God knew the weakness and frailty of fallen man, and the extent and spirituality of his own law, when he gave it upon mount Sinai; therefore, to say that God gave the law upon mount Sinai, upon supposition that man could keep it, is to charge him with the greatest folly, and to contradict the true end and design of the law's being given.

That man had power to keep the law, and a capacity of being governed by it, as long as he continued in a state of innocency, is readily admitted; but now, as transgressors, all are equally concluded under sin, and shut up under the law; which, as a schoolmaster, is to bring, us unto Christ.

That display of the covenant of works, which God made upon mount Sinai, was clearly intended to shew, that, under that covenant, he was a consuming fire, and could not be approached. We read that *the Mount burned with fire, with blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the voice of words; which voice, they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more, for they could not endure that which was commanded; and if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it was to be stoned, or thrust through with a dart; and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said I exceedingly fear and quake.*³

By the moral law given upon mount Sinai, contained in ten commandments, and written upon two tables of stone, I understand the covenant of works. The manner in which Moses broke the tables, sufficiently proves, that it was a broken covenant. It is certain that the law given upon mount Sinai, was in substance the same as that given to Adam in the Garden: for, though the law given to Adam in the

¹ Rom. 5. 8.

² John 3. 18.

³ Heb. 12. 19.

Garden, was contained in one prohibition, viz. “not to eat of the fruit of the tree, of knowledge of good and evil;” and the law given upon mount Sinai was divided into ten distinct heads; yet nothing was thereby superadded to the law given to Adam in the Garden: because that which was sin after the giving of the law upon mount Sinai, was sin before that law was given; this St. Paul clearly proves, *until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed where there is no law;*¹ this is certain, because *death reigned from Adam to Moses; now where no law is, there is no transgression.* I must observe, too, that the conditions were the same, do and live, transgress and die.

In answer to this, a distinction is generally made between the law as a covenant, and the law as a rule so that, though the believer is delivered from it as a covenant; nevertheless; it is said, that he is still under it as a rule. That the law is an eternal standard of holiness, and a rule of judgment, so that all who are found under it will be condemned by it, is readily granted; but to say that the believer is under the law, is unscriptural; neither can this distinction be admitted, for the reason given in the Baptist Letter: viz. *“to admit the law as a rule, is to suppose a capacity in man of keeping it, and of being governed by it.”*

It must certainly discover the grossest ignorance of the nature, end, extent, and spirituality of the law, to affirm that any of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam (except the God man) could possibly fulfil the law. To affirm this, is truly Antinomianism: for who is against the law, so much as he who affirms, that fallen man can personally keep it, yea fulfil it? The Psalmist says, *thy commandment is exceeding ‘broad’;*² but if frail, fallen man can personally keep and fulfil it, it is exceeding narrow; besides, if man could personally fulfil it then Christ has died in vain. No man, I am sure, who has ever been killed by the law, or to whom the righteousness of Christ had ever been revealed, could presume to say, that man can personally fulfil the law. I would judge

¹ Rom. 5. 14.

² Psalm 119. 96.

no man in that sense of which St. Paul speaks, yet every man will be judged according to his obedience or disobedience to the gospel; *he that believeth, and is baptized (by one Spirit into one body) shall be saved; but he who believeth not shall be damned.*

The greatest confusion arises from not clearly distinguishing between obedience to the moral law, and obedience to the gospel. If obedience is spoken of in scripture, the natural man immediately supposes that it means personal obedience to the moral law. If the commandments are spoken of, he supposes that the ten commandments are meant; if the law is spoken of, he knows of no law but the law of works, under which he lies. But St. Paul speaks of obedience to the gospel, the *wrath of God is revealed against all those who obey not the gospel*. There are two commandments given by our Lord, to believe and love; as well as ten commandments given by Moses; there is the law of faith, as well as the law of Works; the law proceeding from mount Zion, as well as the law given upon mount Sinai. From not making this distinction, many passages which speak of obedience to gospel, are understood as if speaking of man's personal obedience to the moral law: to obey the gospel, is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and submit to his righteousness. He who thus obeys the gospel, and submits to the righteousness of Christ, in the eye of the law is one *who doeth righteousness, and is righteous even as Christ is righteous; for his righteousness is unto all, and upon all them that believe*, which, of course, must exclude all other righteousness.

I have thus proved my first assertion, that the law was not given upon supposition that man could keep it; because God knew, at the time when he gave the law, that man could not keep it; and so far from giving it upon supposition that man could keep it, the true design, for which the law was given, was to shew that he *could not* keep it, since it proves that to be Disobedience, which man supposes to be Obedience.

Secondly, I am now. to prove, in. the second place, that the believer is absolutely and entirely delivered from the law. The end being answered for which it was given; the relationship is dissolved, and the authority abrogated; Christ, being the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, by whom transgression was finished, and an end was made of sin; for sin being the transgression of the law, it cannot be imputed where there is no law, for *where there is no law there is no transgression.*¹ Now Christ, in his flesh, abolished the law, for *by one offering of himself once offered, he hath for ever perfected, them that are sanctified, having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*²

Hence the apostle, in the 7th to the Romans, says, *Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead, wherein we were held that we should serve in newness of Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. The law has dominion over a man as long as it liveth, the same as a woman, who hath a husband, is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law, by the body of Christ.* It appears, from the manner in which the apostle expresses himself, that a believer has no more to do with the law, than a woman has to do with a former husband, who is dead and buried, she being married to another man. Again, St. Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, makes use of another comparison, equally just and striking, to describe the believer's deliverance from the law, when he compares it to a schoolmaster; *the law (says he) is our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ; but when faith is come, we are no more under the schoolmaster.*³ And in another place he says, *the heir differs nothing from a servant, though he be Lord of all, but is under tutors and guardians till the time appointed of the father;* but when that time is come, he is no more under tutors and guardians;

¹ Rom. 4. 15.

² Heb. 10. 14.

³ Gal. 3. 24.

therefore, says the apostle, *until faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed*. We find the nature, end, and issue of a law work, clearly described in the twelfth chapter to the Hebrews, for the *chastisement* there spoken of means *conviction*, or that distress which the soul goes through under the law as its schoolmaster; we there see the nature of conviction, that it is an education, as our Lord says, he that has heard and learned of the father, cometh unto me. The end or design of conviction, is to beat the soul off from any conceit of its own holiness, that it may *be partaker of Christ's holiness*. The end, or issue of conviction, is peace of conscience, *for it brings forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised by it*. The man who is brought to see, by the law, that he is accursed and unclean, cannot rest till he is brought to see that he has every thing in Christ, *who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*; so that, being wholly unclean by nature, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, he is made perfectly clean, being *washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*.¹

That the believers thus made perfectly righteous and faultless before God, is a glorious truth; for, to that end *Christ was made sin, that we might be the righteousness of God in him*; if the believer is thus righteous, then it follows that the law has nothing to do with him, for *it was not made for a righteous man*; for what things the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law; but ye are not under the law, but under grace.

From Hence it appears, that a believer is as much delivered from the law, as a woman is delivered from her husband when he is dead and buried; or as an heir is delivered from his guardian, when, being of full age, he has taken the management of his affairs into own hands; or as much as a boy when taken from school, is delivered from his

¹ 2 Cor. 6. 11.

schoolmaster.

I come now, in the third place, to answer the leading objections which are generally made to that doctrine, which holds that the believer is absolutely and entirely delivered from the law.

1. The first: objection is this, that if the believer is absolutely and entirely delivered from the law, then he has nothing to restrain him from giving loose to his passions, and vicious inclinations.

This objection must suppose the law to be a restraint from sin, which is so far from being true, that by reason of the corruptions of our heart, it provokes to sin; for though there is nothing sinful in the law itself, on the contrary, *the law is holy, and the commandments holy, just, and good*; yet sin, says the apostle, taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence, for the *motions of sin, which were by the law wrought in me, to bring forth fruit unto death.*¹ For such is the bent and force of our corrupt nature, that the more strictly any thing is forbidden, the more eagerly it is coveted. A man fretful under the law, may be compared to an unruly horse; the more he is curbed the more headstrong he grows; for the law, working wrath, and terrifying the conscience, thereby stirs up the enmity which there is in every man's heart naturally against God, for the carnal mind is enmity against God. This enmity lies dormant till conscience is terrified, and the soul distressed; then the enmity appears, and the poor soul is brought, with Job, to curse the day he was born, the womb that bare him, and the paps which gave him suck, crying out in the bitterness of his soul, because the arrows of the Lord stick fast in him, and his hand presseth him sore, *why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?, why did the knees prevent me? and why the breast that I should suck?* I must suppose that those who are so fond of the law, never heard the voice of the law speaking in their conscience, otherwise they would cry,

¹ Rom. 7. 5.

with the Israelites, *we would hear this voice no more*; and God answered, *they have well-spoken that which they have spoken,*¹ in desiring to hear this voice no more; I, therefore, will send them *a prophet from among their brethren, they shall hear him.*

He who knows any thing experimentally of the law, knows that it cannot make the soul hate sin; the greatest horror and distress imaginable cannot make the soul hate sin; the torments of the damned cannot make the soul hate sin, but hate God; nothing can make the soul hate sin, but the *love of God, shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.* So that not the law, but *grace teacheth us to .deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly in the world;* not fear, but love, constrains us not to sin.

The next objection is this; if the law be not the rule, the believer has nothing whereby he may regulate his conduct.

This objection supposes the law to be a perfect, and the only proper rule of conduct; if perfect, it must needs teach us the whole of our duty, but this it does not, for the law makes nothing perfect, neither does it leave any room for repentance and faith, much less does it teach us to depend upon the righteousness and blood of Christ for salvation. It is generally supposed that the law is a perfect copy or transcript of the moral perfections of Deity. This cannot be, if mercy is a perfection of Deity; for though the law discovers the justice and holiness of God, yet there is not the least trace of mercy to be found in the law itself, only in subserviency to the gospel, where alone mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other. There is not a commandment in the law which is not more clearly expressed in the precepts of the gospel, whilst the law says, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; the gospel says, if thy brother trespass against thee seventy times seven, forgive him.— Which shall we make our rule?

¹ Deut. 17. 7.

As this objection seems to arise from a concern for morality and good manners, it may be thought that we are enemies to morality, in attempting to set the law aside as a rule; and, indeed, it is commonly insinuated that we wish to be delivered from the law, that we might continue in sin. But, says the apostle, *shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?* God forbid! *How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

The real truth of the matter lies here; the believer has *the law written in the fleshly table of his hearty whereby he servest not in the oldness of the letter, but in newness of spirit,*¹ not going back to the covenant of works, as contained in ten commandments, and written upon two tables of stone, which is the oldness of the letter, but with good-will, doing service as unto the Lord; for, seeing the law fulfilled by Christ, he can say, *I delight in the law of God after the inner man*; and can cry out, *Oh! how I love thy law!* But it is impossible for an unbeliever, whatever he may say, to love or to delight in that law by which he sees himself condemned. Let hell and the curse be removed out of the believer's sight, and from his conscience, nevertheless, the earnest desire of his soul, is to live more and more in conformity to the divine will, more and more devoted to his God and Saviour: therefore, it is a great mistake to suppose that we are against the morality of the law, because we say that the believer is absolutely and entirely delivered from it; it is not because we disapprove of the *morality* of the *law*, or that we would refuse to be *tried* by the *law*, in respect of our conduct in life BEFORE MEN, that we object to that phrase, the law a rule of life! but it appears to me; not only an insult to common sense, but the highest indignity offered to the eternal majesty of heaven, to say that we observe the law as a rule; when, at the same time, we live in the willful and allowed violation of the fourth commandment, which says, the seventh day is the sabbath: how then can the law be observed as a

¹ 2Cor. 3. 3.

rule, when the first day is observed, and not the seventh?

The great objection to the phrase is this—the covenant of works being fulfilled by Christ, no longer exists, as to the believer, under the form of a law; for there can be no law without a sanction—the sanction of the moral law is the curse. There is no curse, *no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus*; therefore, the sanction being taken away, the covenant of works, as to a believer, exists no more under the form of a law. It is impossible to understand the scriptures, unless the two covenants be kept each in its proper place: *the law is good, if a man use it lawfully*;¹ but *the law is not of faith*.

As to that distinction which is generally made between the law as a covenant, and the law as a rule, I can only say, that it has been adopted by formidable writers, who, I believe, were honest in their distinction, and for whose memory I still retain a sincere veneration; but I cannot suppose that the elders and messengers, who published this Circular Letter, were honest in *their* distinction, because, in one place they say, “it is a glorious truth, which we readily allow, and in which we greatly rejoice, that believers are delivered from the law, as a covenant of life;” yet, in another place, the believer is said to be under the law in its covenant form, inasmuch as it offers rewards according to obedience. “Let us now (they say) take some notice of the rewards which the law proposes; by the rewards of the law, we mean that happiness which is to be obtained, either in obedience to its authority, or in consequence of obedience.” Is not this the covenant of works? Is not here great encouragement to work? Not only that happiness which naturally arises from a performance of what the law requires; but there is something which looks like over wages, “which the divine being promises to bestow on the obedient, of his sovereign good-will and pleasure.” How nearly does this resemble the popish doctrine of supererogation?

¹ Gal. 3. 12.

As to the distinction made in their Letter, between the law as a covenant, and the law as a rule, it is only in pretense, for, it is preserved strictly in its covenant form, and enforced upon the conditions of the first covenant.

I should be sorry to differ about words, where we agree in sentiment, and for my own part would readily give up any phrase, if another can be found to which all parties can agree, and to which none can object. I would, therefore, propose this phrase, “the scriptures are the rule of faith and practice;” surely this is as extensive in its meaning as to say, that the law is a rule of life; to which, for my own part, I cannot consent, because it implies that the believer is under the curse, as *many as are of the works of the law are under the curse*;¹ if so, the foundation is destroyed, and gospel liberty is at an end.

To say that the believer needs the written law of ten commandments to regulate his conduct, is to set aside the *law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which sets him free from the law of sin and death*;² by this, those elders, who through faith obtained a good report, must certainly have regulated their conduct; for the written law was not given till 430 years after the promise made to Abraham. There is but *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Holy Ghost, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*.³ A believer in every age always sustained the same character, and. *as many as are the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God; and if led by the Spirit of God, the apostle says, ye are not under the law*.⁴ for the spirit surely is a sufficient guide, without any other direction and assistance, and to this purpose it was given at the day of Pentecost, as a dispensation distinct from the Sinai dispensation.

Here lies the difference between a believer and an unbeliever; the one is under the law, the other is under grace.

Fourthly, I come now to shew what it is to be under the law, and

¹ Gal. 3. 10.

² Rom. 8. 2.

³ Eph. 4. 5.

⁴ Gal. 5. 18.

what it is to be delivered from the law.

To be under the law is to be under its sentence, without strength, without righteousness, without a knowledge of God, without love to God, and without even a will to be saved in that way which God has appointed.

If I was to describe those who are under the law, I should say not only the openly profane, but the man who rests in his moral character, in outward reformation, in the profession of religion, in his strict attendance upon religious exercises, in the literal knowledge of the scriptures, in any particular system or sentiment; without a sense of God's pardoning love, by the revelation of Jesus Christ; is certainly under the law; for though religion obliges to morality, to reformation, to profession, to attendance upon religious exercises, and to the maintaining of certain sentiments, yet it does not consist in these things. These things may be where there is no true religion, but there can be no true religion where these things are wanting.

It is certain from the word of God, that a man may go far in religion, and yet remain shut up under the law, destitute of saving grace: a man may feel distress and horror, even to despair, like Cain and Judas; he may be deeply humbled, as Ahab; he may seek repentance diligently with tears, like Esau, and yet be lost. It is certain that he may preach and prophecy, like Balaam or Saul; he may be zealous for the truth, as Jehu; or, according to St. Paul, *he may have all knowledge, and understand all mysteries; he may give his body to be burnt, and his goods to feed the poor, yet if he has not charity,*¹ that is love, all is nothing: this is the turning point, this determines our true character; a sense of God's pardoning love, by the revelation of Jesus Christ. And then hope maketh not ashamed, when *the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.*

Faith delivers from the law; *before faith came we were kept under*

¹ 1 Cor. 13. 2.

the law, shut up unto the faith which should be afterwards revealed, wherefore, the law was our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith, but after that faith is come, we are no longer under the schoolmaster.

Since faith delivers from the law, and introduces the soul into a new state, *by translating it from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God*, I shall briefly explain the nature and effects of saving faith, according to the scriptures.

I would entirely lay aside the various definitions and distinctions of faith, which prevail according to the different creeds and confessions of professing christians, and confine my thoughts to the scriptures, from which I learn that there is but one true saving faith, and that every thing short of that is a dead faith.

St. Paul says, *faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*; i. e. faith gives the soul the real and actual possession and enjoyment of that happiness which all hope for, and which all are seeking; upon believing, says the apostle (not after ye believed, as it stands in the common translation) ye were sealed with that holy spirit of promise which is the earnest of our inheritance: faith, likewise, is a full demonstration, a decisive evidence, a clear conviction of *those things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive*,¹ otherwise than by the revelation of God's spirit; but, says the apostle, *God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit, the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God; for what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of a man which is in him, even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God; the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

That faith is the gift of God, and of the immediate operation of his

¹ 1 Cor. 2. 9.

Spirit, is clear from many express scriptures; it is said, that *no man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*; St Paul says, writing to the Thessalonians,¹ *our gospel came not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*; and in his epistle to the Romans,² he says, *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth, for therein the righteousness of Christ is revealed from faith to faith, and his prayer is that God would fulfil the work of faith with power*;, where this is not the case, faith is dead, as clearly appears from what St. James says,³ *what doth it profit, though a man say that he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?* that is a bare assent of the understanding, without power or life. No, if a brother or sister should be naked or destitute of daily food, it would not satisfy the cravings of hunger, barely to say, be thou filled; neither would it warm them, barely to say be thou clothed, unless they are actually supplied with those things which are needful for them; even so faith, unless it appropriates Christ, does in no wise profit the soul; *for except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you*. St. James tells us, that Abraham *was justified by works*; that is, by the work or act of faith, not by his personal obedience to the moral law; for the work, by which Abraham was said to be justified, was contrary to the moral law, viz. offering up his son; in like manner Rahab is said to be justified by works; now the works by which she is said to be justified, were contrary to the moral law, betraying her country and telling lies.

The work of which St. James speaks, can mean nothing else but the work or act of faith, and this work of faith always pertains to the conscience, for the mystery of faith lies in a pure conscience; faith purifies the heart, as the apostle says, *ye have purified the heart by obeying the truth*,⁴ *through justification of the spirit, and belief of the*

¹ 1 Thess. 1. 5.

² Rom. 1. 16.

³ James 2. 14.

⁴ 1 Pet. 1. 22.

*truth.*¹

This is the most important enquiry in which any person can be engaged to examine himself whether he be in the faith. It may perhaps be asked, how, and by what rule shall he examine himself, by what marks and evidences shall he prove, himself? why, says the apostle, in the same verse, *know ye not even of yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates;*² as if he should say, “is it possible for a soul to experience such a change, without knowing it?” The great question is this—have ye received the Holy Ghost? St. John says, hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the spirit which he hath given us: and again,³ the same apostle says *we know that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his spirit;* and again, *he that believeth hath the witness in himself;* and again, *by this we may assure our hearts before him; if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*

There are many marks and evidences laid down, by which professors are often called upon to examine themselves, which must necessarily take the eye off from the right object, which is Christ; consequently, must bring darkness and distress upon the soul, and which, after all, never can bring the soul to any certain or happy conclusion, as to its true estate.

Sometimes distress of mind is made a mark or sign of grace, and conviction is to be looked upon as conversion; but if a soul is really convinced, it never will be satisfied till the Lord speaks peace by his spirit; for conviction is so far from being conversion, that our Lord makes it a proof of the want of faith, for he says the spirit is sent to convince of sin, *because they do not believe.* Reformation, profession, and many other such like marks, are often insisted upon, but all this may be seen of men; religion is best determined by what passes

¹ 2 Thess. 2. 13.

² 2 Cor. 13. 5.

³ 1 John 3. 24.

between God and the soul in private, and the change which takes place in the soul upon believing, can only be effected by the mighty power of God, by which he is brought from being under the law, to experience the glorious and happy liberty of God's dear children.

I would now only make two or three remarks, and commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

From the doctrines maintained in the Baptist Letter, we may see the danger of admitting any phrase or term, any doctrine or article of faith, which cannot clearly be proved from the scriptures, for upon this term or phrase, the law a rule of life or conduct, an attempt is made to set up man's personal righteousness, to the effectual exclusion of the righteousness of Christ,

If the justification of a soul is to be proved by sanctification, and sanctification is to be proved by our obedience to the moral law, then the evidence of the spirit must be excluded in justification; the soul never can come to any rest or peace.

Hence we find, that persons are often taught to look into themselves for that which they can never find, instead of looking up to Christ, who, of God, is made unto the believer, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

That there is a desire and disposition in the mind of every true believer, arising from a sense of God's love and maintained by God's spirit, to live in conformity to the divine will, and continually to enjoy communion with God, is ever to be insisted upon as the effect of faith, but this being insisted upon, the truths of the gospel are sufficiently guarded, without the curses of the law.

If the believer is not entirely delivered from, the law; the doctrine of justification by faith alone is overturned, and Christ denied in his offices of prophet, priest, and king; for as our prophet, we are to hear him; as our priest, he hath finished transgression, and made an end of

sin; as our king, the church can only be subject to him.

As there is a highway cast up for the ransomed of the Lord to return, let us take the stones which were against us, and contrary to us, out of the way, and since we have such an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near, with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, because he is faithful who hath promised.

Having thus briefly stated my objections to that phrase, the law a rule of life, I leave you to enlarge upon what has been thus slightly touched upon, with earnest prayer, that the Lord in infinite mercy would accompany it with his blessing; for believe me, with real concern for your soul's eternal welfare, your sincere friend and servant in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

JOHN BRADFORD.

CIRCULAR LETTER.

THE ELDERS AND MESSENGERS OF THE SEVERAL BAPTIST CHURCHES, MEETING AT

Aulcester, Cosely, Upton, Bengworth, Hook Norton, Worcester, Birmingham, Leominster, Warwick Brittle-Lane, Pershore, AND Bourton-on-the-Water, Tewkesbury, Westmancoat.

Having received Letters also from *Bromsgrove* and *Cirencester*.

Being met in Association at AULCESTER, in *Warwickshire*, on the 6th and 7th of *June*, 1786:

Maintaining the important Doctrines of Three equal Persons in the Godhead;—eternal and personal Election!— original Sin;— particular Redemption;—free Justification by the Righteousness of Christ imputed;—efficacious grace in Regeneration;—the final Perseverance of the Saints;—and the Independence of the several Christian Societies they represent: *To whom they send Christian Salutation.*

Dear BRETHREN,

HAVING an increasing concern for your spiritual prosperity, we readily embrace every opportunity to promote in you the knowledge of divine truth, and to guard you against dangerous errors. Of all the errors with which the Christian church is, or ever has been, infested, none is in its nature more absurd, and in its consequences more subversive of all true religion, than the *libertine* doctrine of ANTINOMIANISM. On this worst of all heresies, some of you, brethren,

have repeatedly desired our thoughts, in a circular letter; and we now cheerfully comply with your request.

ANTINOMIANISM is that doctrine which opposes the authority of the moral law, considered as a rule of conduct; and an *Antinomian* is one who denies that believers are under obligations to obey the moral law.

In sentiment, some persons are *Antinomians*, who nevertheless, we hope, from the force of other principles, love, practice, and delight in holiness. The sentiment itself is, however, very dangerous; and probably no instance can be produced of a person universally denying the obligations of believers to obey the law who has not himself, at some time or other, been drawn into sin by the pernicious principle.

That we may, if possible, eradicate the sallacious sentiment, permit us, brethren, to inform you, that by the moral law we intend all the preceptive part of the decalogue, or ten commandments, with every thing else of the same nature, that is discoverable by reason, or revealed in scripture.

To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, with all our mind; and to love our neighbour as ourselves; is, we are informed by the best expositor, the substance of the moral law. To love the Lord with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind, includes, no doubt, knowledge of God, reverence of him, faith and trust in him, gratitude to him, delight in God, acquiescence in his will, and obedience to his authority. To love our neighbour as ourselves, must comprehend the exercise of benevolence, justice, and humanity, towards him, in every kind office which can promote his present and future happiness.

Let us now take some notice of the obligations which men are under to obey the moral law. The nature and fitness of things obliges men to obey this law; its authority being founded in reason, and not in arbitrary will. If you wish to see the truth of this assertion, reflect on the following things, which are the immoveable basis on which the

authority of the law is built. The *glorious character* of the blessed God;—*the intimate relation* in which men stand to him;—the *great* and *innumerable benefits* they have received from his munificence;—their *capacity* of being governed by a law;—and the *nature* of the moral law.

In the *glorious character* of Jehovah, meet, in perfection, every excellence which can be desired in a legislator. See in him infinite knowledge and wisdom; perfect sincerity, veracity, and faithfulness; almighty power; great compassion; spotless purity; consummate goodness; supreme authority.

Ought we not, therefore, to devote our understandings to the contemplation of the fountain of all intelligence? Ought not a being of perfect sincerity, veracity, and faithfulness, to be believed without a hesitation, in all his declarations; and trusted without suspicion, in all his promises? Is it not right that favours great and innumerable should be received with gratitude? Ought not infinite majesty to be regarded with the profoundest reverence? Is it not fit that perfect beauty should be admired and adored? Ought not consummate goodness to be the object of our highest delight? And is it not perfectly reasonable that supreme, equitable, authority should be cheerfully and constantly obeyed?

A consideration of the *intimate relation* in which we stand to the Almighty, will further shew the indispensable obligations we are under to obey the moral law. God is our great Creator, the Father of our spirits, and the former of our bodies; our merciful preserver; our liberal benefactor; and our righteous governor and judge. Can we properly reflect on the relations in which we stand to the divine Being, under these glorious characters, without seeing the reasonableness of obedience to the authority of his law?

Let your minds dwell on some of those *great* and *innumerable benefits* you have received from the Lord, and you will have additional

evidence that his law is founded on the nature and fitness of things. Are we not indebted to him for all the powers and faculties both of body and soul? Is he not our life, and the length of our days? Doth he not feed, and clothe, and protect us? Are not we beholden to him for our friends, our education, and all the pleasures of society? In a word. What felicity have we had, have we now, or ever expect, of which God is not the Author? None; unless we are associates with devils, and find pleasure in wickedness: and, if so, How great is that mercy which prevents our destruction, affords us the means of grace and the hope of eternal glory! Now, if benefit be a ground of obligation, and if obligation to obedience be proportioned to favours received, then it must be our indispensable duty to love him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, who is the author and giver of every good and perfect gift.

We allow that obligation to obey the moral law supposes a *capacity* of being governed by a law. This capacity man has, being a rational creature and a free agent. Were he not a rational being, he could not know the difference between moral good and evil; and consequently all his actions would be indifferent in their nature, though not in their consequences. And, if man were not a free agent, but acted from invincible foreign agency, against his will, certainly there would be neither sin nor holiness in his actions. But this is not the case with man; for he has both rationality and free agency, and is therefore capable of being governed by a law. The last thing on which we wished you to reflect, that you may perceive the moral law is founded in reason and not in arbitrary will, is the *nature* of that law.

And, to express its *nature*, what terms can we adopt so pertinent as those already sanctified by the Holy Spirit, spoken of by the Apostle Paul, his faithful amanuensis? “The law is *holy*, and the commandment is *holy, just, and good*.” It is *pure* in its precepts, *equitable* in its sanctions, and admirably *calculated* to promote the *happiness* of all who obey its authority. Is it not evident to every

pious person, that the highest happiness, of which man is capable, consists in the contemplation of the fountain of all intelligence; firm faith and trust in the declarations and promises of God; cheerful gratitude for innumerable favours; profound veneration of infinite majesty; adoration of the fountain of all moral excellence; delight in consummate goodness; and cheerful constant obedience to supreme equitable authority? This indeed appears to us to be the highest happiness of which Gabriel the Arch-angel is capable. And these things, which enter so essentially into our happiness, are the things which are commanded by the moral law; so that, if it be our interest to be happy, we are bound to obey that law.

Should any of you, brethren, be disposed to consider the will of God as distinct from the nature and fitness of things; that *will*, we affirm, demands obedience to the moral law. That it is the will of the Divine Being men should obey his law, is abundantly evident from scripture; it being what he has there so repeatedly and so solemnly enjoined. And this idea is further confirmed by the voice of reason. The blessed God necessarily wills, that which is most calculated to promote his own glory, and the happiness of his creatures; obedience to the moral law is most calculated to promote these important ends; therefore it is the will of God men should be obedient to this law. Having considered the obligatory force of the divine law, let us now take some notice of the nature of those rewards which the law proposes. By the rewards of the law, we mean that happiness which is to be obtained either *in* obedience to its authority, or in *consequence* of obedience. The felicity to be obtained by obedience to the moral law is either natural or sovereign. By natural reward, we mean that happiness which naturally arises from a performance of what the law requires: by sovereign reward, that happiness which is not naturally and necessarily connected with obedience to the law, but which the divine Being promises to bestow on the obedient, of his sovereign good pleasure.

This distinction of natural and sovereign rewards leads us to the consideration of the moral law, both as a rule of conduct and a covenant of life. As a rule of conduct, it is the law of our creation, which was originally written on man's heart. As a covenant of life, it was a gracious constitution, according to which God promised to bestow eternal life on him who should perfectly obey it. We call it a gracious constitution, because it was by the sovereign good pleasure of God that eternal life was ever connected with man's obedience; he being indispensably obliged to that obedience, although no such promise had been made to him.

Many important ends were to be answered by perfect obedience to the moral law, as the law of our creation and a rule of conduct, independently of the sovereign reward of everlasting life; such as, the honour of God, absolute freedom from disorders both of body and mind; the natural pleasures to be found in the practice of universal holiness; continuance in the favour of God; the testimony of a good conscience; a sense of the approbation of the Deity, and communion with him.

That believers are delivered from the law, considered as a covenant of life, is a glorious truth, which we readily allow, and in which we greatly rejoice. And we are also persuaded they are not under the moral law, considered as a part of that covenant which God made with Abraham and his natural seed; obedience to which covenant was enforced only with temporal rewards and calamities. But, while we allow believers are delivered from the law as a covenant of life, and a part of the Mosaic dispensation, we affirm they are still under it as a rule of conduct. But, as we claim no dominion over your faith, and are as far from wishing you to think by our authority as the authority of any man or set of men, we shall not put you off with our assertions and affirmations, as if they were demonstrative, but shall attempt to prove what we have affirmed by solid argument.

It hath been already proved that all men, considered as the creatures

of God, are necessarily under the law as a rule of conduct; consequently, believers, as well as others, were once bound to obey its authority.

It hath also been proved that the obligations men are under to obey the moral law arise from the glorious character of God; the intimate relations subsisting between him and us; the great and innumerable benefits we have received from his munificence; the nature of the moral law; and our capacity of being subject to its authority. Now, if these things, necessarily oblige men to obey the moral law, it will follow that our obligations to obedience must continue, so long as the reasons on which they are founded abide the same. Does faith in Christ, or any thing else, destroy those pillars on which the authority of the moral law stood? Doth it render the character of God less glorious? Doth it destroy the intimate relations in which we stood to our Creator? Doth it diminish the benefits we have received from the Lord? Doth it lessen our capacity of being governed by a law, or alter the nature of the moral law? If it does, in the room of praying, “Lord, increase our faith,” we ought to deprecate it, as one of the greatest judgments that can possibly befall us.

Nothing is more evident to us, than that the faith connected with salvation, by the gracious appointment of God, is such a belief of the truths of the gospel, as engages the person who is the happy subject of it to renounce his own righteousness as the matter of his justification in the sight of God; to trust in the free-grace of God, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; supremely to love, and cheerfully to obey God his Saviour. And perhaps the best way to reconcile all the seeming contrary passages in scripture, about justification by faith and justification by works, is to consider true faith as a principle of good works. And, if true faith be a principle of good works, or inseparably connected with them, then faith can never make void the law, but must establish it, as the infallible standard of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

But it may be said, The righteousness of Christ supplies the place of the believer's obedience to the law; therefore he is freed from obligations personally to fulfil the law. As this is the most specious argument for Antinomianism we know of, and as we fear many have been, and some still are, deluded by it, we shall therefore take the more pains to discover its futility.

By the righteousness of Christ, we suppose the objector to mean the Redeemer's perfect conformity to the moral law, and propitiatory sufferings. This righteousness, he asserts, supplies the place of ours, and frees believers from their obligations personally to fulfil the law.

That the righteousness of Christ doth in some respects supply the place of ours, we readily allow; and that our obedience to the law is not necessary for those ends which are fully answered by the obedience of Christ, we cheerfully grant; but that the righteousness of Christ, *universally*, supplies the place of ours, so that believers are delivered from their obligations to fulfil the law, this we deny, and the sentiment we abhor.

That thing, which fully supplies the place of another, answers all the purposes that other was intended to answer. If therefore it can be proved that the righteousness of Christ answers *all* the ends our personal righteousness was intended to answer, we grant it fully supplies its place, and renders our obedience unnecessary: but that the righteousness of Christ doth not answer all the purposes for which ours was intended, will be evident from a review of some of those ends which were to be answered by our obedience.

These were some of the ends which were to be answered by our own obedience to the moral law, as the law of our creation, and a perfect rule of conduct.—By our own righteousness we were *personally* to *honour* our Maker; to *experience* the exalted pleasures which are to be found in *the practice* of holiness; enjoy *communion* with God; the *testimony* of a *good conscience*; and a *delightful sense* of the

approbation of Jehovah. Do we, by the righteousness of Christ, personally honour God? Do we, by that righteousness, experience the exalted pleasures which are only to be found in the practice of holiness? Doth the righteousness of the Redeemer capacitate for communion with God? Is it by that we enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, and a delightful sense of the approbation of Jehovah? Surely not. The righteousness of Christ not answering these important purposes, can never supply the place of our own *personal* obedience to the moral law, by which alone these ends can be answered.

That the righteousness of our Lord doth not free believers from their obligation to obey the moral law, is abundantly evident from this consideration: That righteousness alters not the immoveable foundation on which our obligations to obey the law are built. Will any man offer such violence to common sense, reason, and scripture, as to affirm the righteousness of our Redeemer renders the character of God less amiable; abolishes the intimate relations in which we stood to our Maker, Benefactor, and Governor; lessens the benefit we have received from God; and diminishes our ability of being governed by a law, which is holy, just, and good. But, if not, then the righteousness of Christ cannot free any one from his obligations to fulfil the moral law. In a word, the righteousness of our adorable Lord is so far from delivering believers from their obligations to obey the law as a rule of conduct, that it abundantly increases and confirms them. So true is it that the gospel establishes the authority of the law.

We have allowed that man, by his perfect obedience to the moral law as the covenant of life, would, according to the gracious appointment of God have obtained eternal life. We say the moral law, because Christ hath so interpreted that law as to include obedience to every positive precept: for it is impossible to reconcile a willful neglect of any of God's commands with that perfect love to God and our neighbour which are commanded in the law. According to the nature of the covenant of life, man's perfect obedience would have

been his title to eternal happiness. . But, according to the gospel covenant, Christ's righteousness is the believer's title to heaven. In this respect, and in no other that we know of, the perfect, glorious, righteousness of Christ, supplies the place of the believer's obedience. The righteousness of Christ is also the meritorious cause of the pardon of sin; but, as our righteousness was never enjoined for that end, 'tis improper to say it supplies the place of ours in that respect.

Man being under obligations perfectly to obey the moral law, independently of the considerations of pardon and eternal life;—his being entitled to these important blessings by the righteousness of Christ—cannot possibly free him from those obligations to obey the law, which he is naturally and necessarily under, as the creature of God. 'Tis true, pardon of sin, and the gift of everlasting life, increase our obligations to yield that obedience which was due to God before. And from hence it appears, believers are under greater obligations to obey the law than any other persons under heaven. But to allow the righteousness of Christ *universally* supplies the place of ours, is to build an impregnable garrison for Antinomians, from which they may easily defend themselves against the most vigorous attacks of the bravest assailants.

Another argument, by which the authority of the law is established, is this: All the duties enjoined by the moral law are enforced on believers in the gospel by the most cogent motives. To cite passages of scripture to prove this assertion, would be to upbraid you with the most egregious ignorance of the New Testament; or, what is worse, the diabolical skill of perverting that blessed volume.

The example of Christ, which it is the indispensable duty of all his disciples to follow, furnishes another solid argument to prove the perpetuity of the moral law.

The horrid reflection which the Antinomian doctrine casts on the Holy Jesus, making him the minister of sin, might properly be used as

a powerful argument for the perpetual authority of the moral law.

The gross absurdities of the doctrine of Antinomianism might also be assigned as proofs of its falsity and wickedness. This doctrine destroys the distinction between good and evil, and yet makes that to be so innocent in a believer, which in an unbeliever is idolatry, blasphemy, adultery, or murder.

But, leaving you to enlarge on these arguments, permit us, brethren, to take our leave of you, by exhorting you to beware of errors in general, but especially of those which are of a practical nature, and destroy the vitals of religion. Learn to entertain honourable sentiments of the moral law. And, while you rejoice in your deliverance from it as a covenant of works, pray to God to write it, as the standard of holiness, on your hearts; that you may delight in its purity and goodness; and in your lives, as well as by your words, vindicate its equitable authority, and maintain its eternal duration.

Signed, by order, and on behalf of, the assembly, by
the Moderator,

JOSHUA THOMAS.

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