

Law & Gospel Distinctions

by John Heydon

“Some Gospel Truths, Catechistically Laid Down, Explained & Vindicated.” 1647.

Such is the absoluteness of God, he is of so pure eyes that he cannot abide sin, but must needs declare his whole displeasure and hatred against that creature whoever he be that he finds sin upon, and thence it was that Adam was banished out of paradise upon his Fall, angels drove out of heaven, and the great and terrible judgment inflicted since on several sorts of men. {Hab.1:13, Is.59:2, Gen.3:24, 6:5-8} Because God doth and ever will proceed against sinners according to the Law, and so God must necessarily, {if we may so speak,} deal with such in rigor, fury and wrath, both abhorring, cursing and condemning all such persons that are in old Adam, and so all men out of Christ, and their sacrifices, though ever so glorious in their own eyes and in the estimation of the saints; yea, though they be according to the letter of the Scripture in the largest extent, in their foolish fancies; {Lk.16:16, Pv.16:25;} because there is no congruity, concord or agreement between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, righteousness and unrighteousness, so that God must kill the sin or the sinner, or the Law will condemn the sinner for it, and God will hear the Law in all just demands against those that are under it. {II Cor.6:14, Gal.3:10, Deut.28:15-29} To inform our judgments, how rightly to use the Law, that we pervert it not, the Law is to be charged upon all sinners in its utmost authority, seeing it entered into the world because of transgression, and is not the Law God’s sergeant to find out and arrest all the Lord’s debtors, {whose debts are discharged by Christ,} to arraign and indict them, yea to cast and condemn them in the court of conscience. Therefore the face of Moses is to be unveiled, that the splendor and glory thereof may break out in the ministry of the Law, to the confusion of all flesh; man and his works are to be proved clearly thereby to be abominable and accursed, and they so to remain till mercy and favor in Jesus Christ relieve them, and God for Christ sake forgive and justify them.

The Apostle is plain, that the Law is the ministration of death and condemnation, and therefore will proceed in its office of condemning man, and it will so long as man liveth in sin, and not give over wounding, condemning and killing sinners, that the slain of the Lord may be many. So that ministers of the Gospel to whom it is committed are aright to use it, but they must be aware that men find not life, ease, rest, liberty or comfort in the Law, and after conviction and guiltiness, though the power of it be in men’s consciences, they dare not slack, abate or mitigate the rigor and power of the Law. Thus, by dealing treacherously in promising life on the condition that if they will be truly sorrowful, repent and amend their sinful lives that the Law will spare them and that God will accept their polluted endeavors; the will for the deed, which is most false and from gross ignorance. Truly this is to deal deceitfully with men, to weave the spiders web, and to skin over the wound and mar souls as much as in them lieth. It is most dangerous, yet old Adam likes as well, and is apt to take it for a safe way to cure his poor soul by. Alas poor soul, when the wretch finds trouble and anguish, through sin guiltiness, for him merely upon his purposes, promises and endeavors to amend his sinful life, to get heart, to recover himself and gather hopes that all will be well with him another day without Christ is but the greatest delusion and folly in the world; yet how many are there in this kingdom and other deluded parts of the world that

think themselves and go current in the opinions of likewise deluded ones for good Christians, and yet know not what Christianity is, but think it some monster of their own doing, framing and working, and so place Christianity, {which is the revealing, receiving and sealing of Christ and all that he is, or hath done and suffered for the elect,} in reforming their lives and conforming to the external worship of God, and the religion professed in the country where they live, and passes down the current of the times; yea, and are ready and do turn to that religion professed by the stronger side, and so they gather comforts from themselves or their performances, though halt, blind and lame, and their reformation being put to the touchstone of the Truth, proves but deformation, distortion and falsification, and if it any time those sect of men preach Christ, or speak of Christianity, it is so confusedly and with such pride, and with the language of the serpent, hiss out shibboleth; but to a truly humbled believer in Christ there is nothing but frothiness, and their words are like unsavory salt, as they cannot pronounce shibboleth Christ; {Judges 12:6;} for of Him they are ignorant, and have no feeling of Christ's spiritual influence and power reigning in the saints; but rigid Moses, the Law and curses rule and reign in them, they working from false grounds to wrong ends, which mars all their undertakings, and produce monstrous works proceeding from a bad root, they themselves being bad trees and can bring forth no other. {Mt.12:33, II Cor.7:9, Is.59:5}

That men and women must not be dallied with in this weighty matter, God requires seriousness and urgency in prosecuting the Law against transgressors, for there is no peace without Righteousness, and it is not a piece or a little parcel of righteousness that will be accepted of God, for the Lord will have it perfect or else it will be abominable unto Him, yea a very plague and he will detest it as dogs-meat righteousness, though it seem as the flower of the field in its own apprehension, and others who may look upon it as a gay thing, as the flowers in their month, so they look upon their own peacock feathers, their works as gay things, till the Sun of Righteousness arise by his fervent heat and burn up the hay and stubble, yea their silver, gold and their cursed opinions of their own righteousness which they have treasured up and looked upon in their unregenerate state as precious things; but upon the sight of Christ, the beauty of them is gone, and there is no more moisture left in them to a believer's eye, and no more taste in them than there is in the white of an egg, and so I understand. {Phil.3:7,8, James 1:11, Is.40:8, I Pet.1:24, I Cor.3:13, Heb.12:29} But all this whilst in a state of unregeneracy thou findest and feelest sin and sin guiltiness, hence is thy inward fear and trembling, unrest and torment in thy bosom; is it not from this, that the presence of God is so terrible unto thee. I say, is it not from this that you live in a continual expectation of wrath, death or some vengeance to be poured down upon thee, what is this but the force and power of the Law and sin in thee which shows thee {to thine own apprehension} thy estate before God according to the Law, as yet thou standest accursed and faith {to anchor securely and solely in Christ} is not yet given thee; and so the wrath of God resteth upon all men so long as they continue in a state of sin and alienation. Then by right all sinners are the wife of this rigid and hard hearted husband, the Law; which knoweth not what mildness, mercy or indulgency is, but rules with extreme severity. Truly sinners are the subjects of this kingdom of miseries, curses and destruction, and the Law hath dominion over them to look after them, and to teach them, and to see that they do their duty to God, to accuse them and terrify their consciences, and pursuing them with a deserved vengeance, and thus the old man and unbeliever is the disobedient, wicked and rebellious man; for disobedience and unbelief is one and the same thing in Gospel phrase and truth. {I Tim.1:9, Eph.4:22, II Thes.1:8, Acts 5:32, Rom.16:26}

Then Christians are redeemed from the Law by Christ in a due and right course of justice, he having paid the utmost mite that the Law could require; not by might, violence and power, and so wronging the Law or suffering it to sustain any loss or damage, but by fulfilling the same; thus our David, {shepherd and anointed, not without hazard, but with the loss of his life,} taketh this lamb out of the lion's mouth, and frees him from the power of the bear; that is, from the power of the Law, sin, death, hell, &c., and the curse; and

here Paul in showing how and by whom this rescue is made denotes two things to us, the equity thereof and the fullness thereof; and in the equity of it, he prevents this objection that might be made against this doctrine: Are not men debtors to the Law so long as they have sin remaining in them; are they not sinners then and hath not the Law power over them; first, to hold them prisoners and keep them forever, and to put them to death too, and keep them under death perpetually? Answer: No, for Christ by the body of his death hath freed the whole Church from death, hell and the curse in this sense, and from the Law of commandments two ways; by paying the debt of suffering and by paying the debt of service as our Surety Representative, and its fullness is that it is a complete, perfect and an everlasting redemption; {Rom.10:4, Is.53:5,6, II Cor.5:21, Gal.4:5, Is.59:20, Rom.11:26, Heb.7:22, Heb.10:14, Col.2:9,10, Heb.7:25,26;} and hence the church is freed from the authority, dominion, offices and consequences of the Law. Hence observe the change of the believers estate, for he is married to Christ and dead to the Law and alive to God. It is true that I grant you were once {in your own fearful apprehensions,} under the tyranny of that tyrant the Law, till it wearied you and made your lives bitter in causing death to pass upon your consciences, so that you had no life, nor light, nor help; no hope of heaven or Salvation at all, but were possessed with fears and only had such sad conclusions as these, "O; I shall perish, I am utterly lost, I am a damned castaway sinner, God hath forsaken me entirely, there is no mercy for me and I am undone forever; O, vile sinner that I am, a wretched captive and a hell-hound; what will become of me another day; where wilt thou go, O my poor soul; into darkness, utter darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth and pains that are ceaseless, endless and remediless." This was the working of God's spirit of bondage on thee, though thou knewest it not, and what a jubilant time of deliverance, through that exceeding and transcendent mercy of thy God, when all did unexpectedly turn to thy good and unspeakable benefit; God seeing thee in this woeful plight, deplorable state and condition, did commensurate thy case, and stepped in to rescue thee, and by his Son the true David, did freely, fully and completely save thee at once from the Law, sin, death and the curse; so that as in the case of marriage, whilst the wife lives she is bound to her husband to obey in all things, but death dissolves this bond and union forever. So here thou art dead to the Law, but know then, by whose means, power and godliness it is that thou art delivered out of so bad a condition and put into so glorious, full and happy estate. It is by the body of Christ; namely in that Christ died, was crucified and buried for thee; to this end, that thou mightest have union and communion with Him and bring forth fruit to God, and Christ thy new Husband, by disclaiming thy own worth and works, thy treasure and all, and live upon thy Husband's worth, excellency, dignity and inexhaustible treasure. {Rom.7:1-4} That after the receiving of God in open vision, Christ comes and rules by his Word and Spirit, as once he did in the days of his flesh, but far more gloriously, mystically, influentially, effectually, powerfully, persuasively, significantly and evangelically, and he appears and reveals himself {by his word and Spirit,} inwardly, spiritually and effectually to the believer in Christ, and declares himself to be the same to that soul that he is in his own nature and office; namely, a Redeemer, Jesus a Savior; {"thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins,"} and this is that revelation of the Son of God in the believing child of Grace. It is true that Christ was so before in respect of God, in his purpose and decree and in the outward ministry of the Gospel, but the consolation thereof was hid from thine eyes until this time and day of Salvation, or rather the application of that Salvation which was wrought by Jesus Christ before thou wast born; but behold now the spirit of wisdom, revelation and well-grounded consolation is now come into thee, revealing the Lord Jesus in all the benefits of his death and passion unto thee; for this is undoubtably certain, that as face answereth face in the glass, so the outward Word and inward work of the Spirit doth in the believer. {Eph.1:17-19} So that there is nothing spoken touching a mans estate in the Law or Gospel, but the Christians conscience can subscribe and seal to it, out of an inward feeling and experimental knowledge thereof; so then, this house of darkness and distress becomes the time of life

and light in Christ. "When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live." {Ez.16:6} Now the Son of Righteousness arises, who hath health in his wings, and bringeth light to make himself known, by that his own light, the soul may see light; Christ doth manifest himself, who is the inward man of the heart according to his office, a preacher of glad tidings to the meek, a proclaimer of liberty to the captives and the recovering of sight to the blind, and the opener of the door to the poor prisoners of hope, though they were shut up and bound, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, by which the soul finds such succor, help, health, life, liberty, peace, happiness, righteousness and tranquility, and there it rests satisfied and can say, "my God, and my Lord, who hath loved me and hath given himself for me." {Jn.20:28, Gal.1:16, 3:23, Col.1:27, Is.61:1-4, Lk.4:18.} But thou wilt say, is the man that is a Christian a sinner still, a dog or swine? God forbid. For it is only sin that enthralls the creature to the Law and subjects poor men to bondage, and as long as sin remains the authority of the Law cannot cease, but will prevail forever in such a case; but behold Christ washes truly, really and thoroughly in his own immaculate blood; {Rev.1:5, I Jn.1:7, I Pet.1:19;} so that he leaves no spot nor blemish upon the believer's soul. {Eph.5:27, Col.1:22}

Christ hath freely and entirely bestowed himself, his own perfect obedience, which is the Righteousness of God upon the believer, and also the matter of our sanctification; {II Cor.5:21;} and hence, the soul is altogether fair by the beauty and glory of Christ which God hath provided richly and bestowed effectually upon the believer; for no measure or portion of attainable righteousness can appease the conscience; for it is exclusively Christ's Righteousness alone; and until we be clothed with Christ's pureness, the conscience dare not appear in God's sight, for Righteousness is the mother of peace and the elder sister Justification is before reconciliation in this sense, being justified by Christ we are no longer reckoned sinners, sins discharged are no longer debts; sins remitted no sins; the bond that is canceled is a nullity. In the New Covenant there is no remembrance of iniquity, for when once the Spirit of God hath made it out to the soul that they are through Christ freely, certainly and fully pardoned. {Heb.10:17} Then how marvelous is the Lord among his saints, should all true Christians say; who by free donation and Imputation of Christ's perfections makes the saints freely, invisibly and perfectly fulfillers of the Law thereby; so that he cannot be charged with any fault, sin, or punishment, he being now stated into that spiritual, universal and eternal kingdom of his Son, where there is nothing flourishing but righteousness, justice, liberty, safety, peace, joy and pleasures for evermore. {Ps.16:11, Col.1:13, Rom.14:17, Rom.8:33,34, Col.1:22, Eph.5:27} Then let all the children of the bondwoman be schooled daily by their law-teachers, taskmasters and exactors of works to Salvation; I say let these daily impose on them new burdens, and spare not, and require their full tale of bricks, and daily appointed works and services, and load their consciences and memories too with multitudes of precepts, rules, cautions, marks and duties; yea, threaten to whip and lash them too, that they may enjoy no peace, except they diligently and carefully perform all things imposed upon them. But oh my soul hearken thou what thy God speaketh unto thee from mount Zion, who tells thee that thy labor is at an end, the warfare is accomplished, iniquity is pardoned, thy danger is passed, and the work of Salvation is finished already. {Is.40:2, II Tim.1:9} God himself hath wrought it for thee and brought in everlasting Righteousness instead thereof, and do thou peacefully enjoy this, {only blessing that name in which God is comfortably known, who hath done all these things for thee,} truly and with gladness of heart; and do thou impart of what thou hast received to thy brethren, in the like freedom of love, to the pleasuring of others in the corroboration, edification and the building them up in the most holy Faith; and so confirming them in the true Grace of God in which they stand. {Rom.15:2, Jude 20, I Pet.5:12}