

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

In the August issue, in my article ("The Manner of Some") I mentioned the strict attitude, fairly general in the extreme north of Scotland, in the keeping of the Lord's Sabbath, and how everything comes to a sudden halt on a Sunday. In this morning's paper I notice that the ferry company, Caledonian McBrayne, is firmly locked in a bitter struggle with the islanders of Harris and Lewis in connection with proposals for a ferry service to these islands on Sundays. A 'no holds barred' war is taking place and there's even talk of the islanders blockading all ports. One can sympathise with these quiet people not wanting a 'continental Sunday', and the noise and mess that day-trippers would bring, but it's difficult to see how a ferry-service would be a desecration of the Sabbath. This week-end, these same islanders refused to allow the running of the "Sports Aid Race Against Time" on the Sunday and insisted it be run on the Saturday (unwittingly desecrating the 'real' sabbath). Their zeal is admirable, as was Eric Liddle's in refusing to run in the Olympics on a Sunday, but surely it is sadly misplaced and fostered by the clergy of the Free Church of Scotland, who ought to know better. The 'Christian Sabbath' is constantly referred to: an expression difficult to understand: and one which seems to be a contradiction in terms.

These islanders, after all, are like the rest of us in the U.K. in that we are Gentiles, and the Sabbath NEVER EVER applied to Gentiles. Even if the good folk of Harris and Lewis had lived prior to Christ (B.C.) they would not only have not been asked to observe the Sabbath; they would certainly not have been **allowed** to keep the Sabbath (or indeed any other part of the Mosaic Law). The Sabbath was a unique and exclusive sign between God and the Jew. It seems rather ludicrous, does it not, that a people to whom the Sabbath never pertained, should insist on keeping it, especially 2,000 years after it ceased to be binding on those who did receive it – the Jews? It is sometimes alleged that because God rested on the seventh day that the Sabbath fell upon the shoulders of **all** God's creatures but surely the scriptures do not uphold any such view. Ex. 31:13-16 says that the Sabbath was a **sign** between God and Israel, and could hardly be such a sign if previously given to everybody. Deut. 5:15 says that the Sabbath was given to Israel (exclusively) and was to remind them of their deliverance from Egypt. Neh. 9:13-14 says that the Sabbath was given at **Sinai** (notwithstanding the 'trial' Sabbath) and was part of **the law** of Moses. No 'work' was to be done that day and the definition of 'work' has been taken to such lengths that, even today, most Jews would regard switching on a light to come into that category. Breaking the Sabbath in the O.T. was much more serious than a joust with Caledonian McBrayne and carried a **CERTAIN DEATH PENALTY** (Ex. 31:14) even for gather-

ing some sticks (Num. 15:12-36). Amongst those who like to pay lip-service to Sabbath keeping, whether it be Seventh-Day Adventists, or the people in the Outer Hebrides, we rarely hear them calling for the death-penalty for the many who break the Lord's Sacred Sabbath. Is it just a kind of game?

THE LORD'S DAY

But, some would say, the 'Christian Sabbath' has replaced the Jewish Sabbath and although God has changed the day from the seventh day to the first day, the Sabbath rules must still be observed. When pressed on the matter, they will say only **some** of the rules of the Jewish Sabbath apply; certainly not the death penalty. They will also insist that **no work** must be done (but do not care to define 'work') and may also add that we must **devote** Sunday to the Lord (but are not sure exactly what is meant by that). Some years ago I wrote to the Lord's Day Observance Society on this subject and asked for a list of the rules applicable to the 'Christian Sabbath' (with scripture references) but I did not get a reply. One sometimes hears even members of the church talk in these terms but rarely hears the scripture references quoted. Many of those who talk of a complete 'down tools' on a Sunday will still expect the trains and the buses to run; still expect hotels to feed their guests and hospitals to look after their patients on Sundays; still expect power-stations and water-works and police stations to be manned on a Sunday. The early Christians met to break bread on a Sunday **and so should we**, but surely there is no reason in the N.T. for thinking that this makes Sunday the 'Christian Sabbath', or that there is any remote resemblance between Sunday and the Jewish Sabbath. Certainly we remember, in breaking the bread, our rescue from bondage (not from Egypt but from sin) but surely it can't be deduced from this that God changed the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first. I am not advocating that Christians should seek secular work on Sundays and be unable to be in their places to worship God, but just occasionally some, in certain occupations, (like nurses, doctors, firemen, ambulance drivers etc) may have to serve in that capacity. One wonders if the Christian slaves, in N.T. times, prior to Constantine, were given a day off on Sundays?

It was said of John, on the isle of Patmos, that he was "in the spirit" on the Lord's Day (commonly regarded as Sunday) and this 'phrase "in the spirit" has been bandied about over the years to include all kinds of self-imposed restraints for Sundays. A black (or dark) suit used to be insisted upon, and highly polished boots, sober faces; no laughing or loud talking; no 'novel reading'; no whistling; no ball-games for children; no radio; only hymn-tunes to be played upon pianos, etc. These were all supposed to be indications that one was "in the spirit" on a Sunday, when, in fact, that phrase had nothing whatsoever to do with personal demeanour. Most (if not all) Bible Commentators interpret "in the spirit" to mean that John was in a spiritual exaltation in which revelations were given. E.M. Zerr says, of the phrase, "that John was in a spiritual rapture in which he could hear and see things that could not ordinarily be heard and seen." Thus very few of us can ever claim to be "in the spirit" on the Lord's Day: indeed none at all. However, if anyone insists upon keeping an austere Sunday he can do so provided he does not require all others to do likewise. Even if a man insists upon observing the Jewish Sabbath (or being circumcised) no one is likely to stop him but it certainly will not make tuppence worth of difference. In fact, God will expect such an one to keep **the whole law** (Mosaic). This is the logical outcome, and it reflects badly upon Christ. Paul says, to those who insisted that Christians be circumcised, "**Behold I say unto you, that if ye (Christians) be circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law**", (Gal. 5:6) and goes on to show that we are fallen from grace if we want to go back to the law.

THE LAW

When the N.T. talks of “the Law” it generally refers to the Law of Moses, and Paul waged a constant war against Judaizing Christians who confused the law of Christ with Moses, and wanted to drag the Mosaic law (or parts of it) into the Christian faith. Men are still doing this today. Currently in our Bible Study Meetings at Haddington we are carefully examining and contrasting the Old and New covenants, and nothing can be more certain than that **the law** (including the 10 Commandments, the Sabbath, circumcision, animal sacrifices, and all other rites and ceremonies) have gone, lock, stock and barrel, for ever. It must be said that those who want to bring it back (or parts of it) are very selective. For example, those who want to keep the Sabbath seldom want to bring back circumcision, and those who go to the Psalms to find instrumental music ignore the references in that same book to worshipping God in dancing; and very few protestant churches engage in incense burning. As Paul says, those who would go back to Moses’ law (or little bits of it) are in effect turning their backs upon Christ.

It must be doubtful if Paul could have used stronger language in his assertions that the law has gone in its entirety. (Space is limited and only a few quotations can be made). God oftentimes in the O.T. predicted the coming of a new, and very different, covenant (e.g. Jer. 31:31-33) and Paul in (Heb. 8:6-13) states that all these O.T. prophecies have now been fulfilled in Christ and that the New Covenant has come. God’s use of “New” logically means that Moses’ covenant was now “Old” and would pass away. Christ came **“to take away the first (covenant) that He may establish the second”** (Heb. 10:9). Christ took the law away **“having blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us; and hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.”** (Col. 2:14). Christ took the law out of the way: blotting it out, and it must surely be difficult to misunderstand these words. But there is more. Christ said that He came not to destroy the law but to fulfill (fill it full) the law, and we know that any contract fulfilled is no longer of any force. The law was our school-master to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24) and was only a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1). If the first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought for another (Heb. 8:7) but He (Christ) **took away the first that He might establish the second** (Heb. 10:9). **“In that He (God) sayeth ‘A New Covenant’ He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away”** (Heb. 8:11). These statements could be greatly added to, but surely serve to show that the man is without excuse, who would say that any part of that old covenant is still of any force. The law, given by Moses, has been **fulfilled in Christ: it has decayed and waxed old; it has been taken away, blotted out, and has vanished from the earth for ever.**

Faced with the strength of such language, those who want to retain some items of Moses’ law, have tried to short-circuit Paul’s unequivocal words by claiming that **the law can be split up into compartments** such as ‘the moral law’; ‘the ceremonial law’ and the ‘judicial law’ and that only parts of these have been abolished, but some retained. Paul does not seem to have been aware of these distinctions and certainly the N.T. **never ever** mentions them. It is, never the less, argued that the ‘moral law’, the 10 Commandments, was meant to apply to all of mankind everlasting, and therefore has never been abrogated. This is, of course, a nonsense for the ‘10 Commandments’ **never ever** applied to Gentiles. Because the 10 Commandments have been abrogated, with all the rest of the law, does not mean that men can now do as they wish and are without law; for we are all (Jew and Gentile) subject to the law of Christ, and Christ’s teachings are much more exacting than the 10 Commandments and broader in scope. In any case the first 4 of the 10 Commandments had nothing whatever to do with morals, and whole chapters in Exodus, and elsewhere, were devoted to morality.

Jesus certainly never talked in terms of 'the Moral Law' or 'Ceremonial Law' but He did occasionally refer to **'the law and the prophets'** (Matt. 11:12; 22:40) and no doubt meant by 'the law' the first five books of the O.T. written by Moses (The Pentateuch). On one occasion Jesus also spoke of Himself fulfilling scripture and said, **"all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms,"** but usually when the 'the law' is referred to the whole O.T. economy is included. Indeed, twice (in John 10:34: and John 12:3) Jesus said, to the Jews **"It is written in your law"**, and **"We have heard out of the law"** and both times He is referring to something written in the Psalms (i.e. Ps. 82:6; 89:36). Also in John 15:25 Jesus said that it was written in the law **"They hated Me without a cause"** and this is, of course, from Psalm 35:19. And so 'the law' embraced the Psalms. In short; the law, the prophets and the Psalms were all fulfilled in Christ (Luke 24:44).

CONCLUSION

Many have, no doubt, asked, as Paul does, what, then, was the purpose of the law? **"Wherefore then serveth the law?"** (Gal. 3:9) and Paul answers himself (and all others), **"It was added, because of transgressions, UNTIL the Seed (Christ) should come."** Christ has now come and so the law, which was but temporary, is no longer required, and as we have seen, vanished and was taken away so many centuries ago. Is it not strange that 2,000 years later, anyone, Jew or Gentile should want to bring back the beggarly elements which have been blotted out and nailed to the cross of Christ? For the new covenant, (or new testament) to come into force the death of the Testator had to come to pass (Heb. 9:16) and surely we all agree that this took place some 1988 years ago. Thus, the old covenant (with its Sabbath; Holy Days; animal sacrifices; tithing; circumcision; infant membership; instrumental music; dancing eating of meats; incense burning; temple worship; Aaronic priesthood, and all things pertaining thereto) has gone entirely and for ever. **"Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of a new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."** (Col. 2:16; Heb. 10:1). The law was the shadow: Christ is the substance.

May it be that we shall be content with this, and not be harping back to those things Christ has removed. The O.T. is given for our learning and admonition (Rom. 15:4) but not for our obedience or compliance. We are subject only to the law of liberty: the teaching of Christ and His apostles. Truly, **"the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."** (John 1:17). Do we believe it?

EDITOR.