

# OUR SCHOOLMASTER

In a small town a few miles from here it is proposed to instal surveillance cameras high up on buildings to scan the streets below, and hopefully cut down on crime and violence. Apparently the system has been remarkably successful in other towns and people, when “big brother is watching,” seem to behave more circumspectly. Predictably the local “Civil Rights” lobby have been actively opposing the proposal on the basis that there will be an intrusion of privacy. Members of the public have, at random, been interviewed on the streets, and the general consensus shown on T.V. One very elderly lady seemed to speak for most of us when she said that she was delighted with the idea, and that law-abiding subjects have nothing whatsoever to fear from surveillance. The apostle Paul expressed the same sentiment about 2,000 years ago when he said, **“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.”** (Rom. 13:3). As long as we remain law-abiding citizens we can live quite comfortably with any quantity of law; and all manner of scrutiny: it is when we decide to break the law that our troubles might start. In that same Chapter (Rom. 13) Paul goes to some length to show that Christians should be good citizens: scrupulously law-abiding. It must be difficult in some countries, under some vicious dictator, to be always law-abiding, but in this land we should give thanks to God for the very extensive degree of civil liberty enjoyed by all.

Quite apart from our reference to Romans Chapter 13, the Bible has a great deal to say about “the law” or “law” and many young Bible students are often puzzled and perplexed by this subject. Cruden says that “law (in the N.T.) when used alone, most frequently refers to the Mosaic law, but frequently includes the unauthorised additions to the law of Moses, by Jewish leaders.” Thus the term “law” in the scriptures **nearly always means the law of Moses** and, as it occurs well over 100 times in the O.T. and over 160 times in the N.T. it is a subject worthy of our consideration. Much of how the law of Moses is now to be regarded we learn from the N.T., especially the writings of Paul, and while confessing only a very imperfect understanding of the subject personally, I offer the following remarks.

## WHAT WAS INCLUDED

During the “Patriarchal Age”, and up until the birth of Moses, there seems to have been no official codification of law although, obviously, there would be a generally accepted norm of behaviour amongst the various tribes and cultures. However, John says, **“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”**. What exactly was encompassed by “the law”? The first instalment, and basic element,

of the law came in the form of the **Decalogue** (or ten commandments): Ex. 20:2-17. Added to this was the "Book Of The Covenant" (Ex. 24:7) which embraced all the statutes propounded (in Ex. Chaps. 20-23) concerning idolatry; menservants; women-servants; murder; manslaughter; menstealers; cursers of parents; smiters; theft; damage; trespass; borrowing; fornication; witchcraft; bestiality; strangers; widows; slander; false witness; justice; charitableness; the sabbath; the Year of Rest; and the Three Rests. Then there are the laws contained in the **Book Of Leviticus** and the Book Of Numbers concerning burnt offerings; meat offerings; first fruits; peace offerings; trespass offerings; just balances; the priests; laws of eating; prostitution; clean and unclean animals; necromancy; leprosy and leper cleansing; eating of blood; unlawful marriages; adultery; incest; sodomy; the sabbath; the Passover; the Day Of Atonement; the Jubilee; oppression; redeeming servants; disobedience; vows; tithing and "sundry laws". Then we have a collection of laws and regulations relating almost exclusively to ceremonial and religious observances such as purification and sacrifice; offerings, priests and vestments; circumcision; Levites and Nazarites.

The above list, while not fully comprehensive, gives us some idea of the broad compass of Moses' law, obviously intended to cover nearly every possible exigency in Jewish life and designed to provide all things necessary for the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual wellbeing of the people. It should be noted that sometimes the prophets and the Psalms were included in the Jewish conception of "The Law" and more than once Jesus said "It is written in **your law**" and went on to quote the words He had in mind: from the Psalms. (see John 1:34; 12:34 and 15:25). Paul also said to the Corinthians, "**In the law** it is written: With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak unto this people." This is a quote from Is. 28:11. And so "the law" is not always confined to the first five books of the O.T. (the Pentateuch) but can include the Prophets and the Psalms.

#### CHRIST'S ATTITUDE TO "THE LAW"

Whereas Jesus was often scathing towards Jewish hypocrisy in relation to Moses' law, especially withering in His contempt of the "Traditions Of The Elders", yet He generally respected and kept the law (concurrent, of course, with His positive intention to ultimately abrogate the law.) He took an independent attitude to Moses, and the law, and claimed that He was not only superior to the Temple (Matt. 12:6) but greater than Moses. He spoke (unlike the Scribes) with complete authority, (e.g. "But I say unto you . . .") while, at the same time, He declared, "**I came not to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfil.**" All that the law, and the prophets stood for, found its fulfilment in Christ. When Christ died, as Testator of His own will, the "Royal Law" (Jas. 2:8) or "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) immediately sprang into force and "the law" of Moses was entirely annulled. The teaching of Jesus went behind the various enactments of the law and highlighted the grand principles upon which they were based; culminating in Christ's declaration that the entire law could in fact be summed in these few words, "**Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself.**" (Mark 12:30). Jesus caused much consternation and amazement amongst the Jews by drawing a distinction between "the weightier matters" of the law, i.e. Judgement, Mercy and Faith, and the meticulous attention to ritual: for many Jews were more concerned with ritual than religion. In the 'Sermon on the Mount' Jesus swept away all the false applications of the law and, bringing into focus the true principles of the law, showed that while the law required action, such action must come from proper motives. Although Jesus and his disciples were often criticised for failing to engage in ritual washings, and for a less than scrupulous observance of the sabbath, Jesus used such opportunities to show that the sabbath (and indeed all the law) was made for man, and not vice versa, and that, had the Jews properly understood the law they would have recognised that God's intention in all His enactments was for the ultimate

wellbeing of His chosen people, physically and spiritually. God always preferred mercy to sacrifice (Matt. 12:7).

### PAUL'S PROBLEMS WITH JUDAIZERS

I suppose it was only to be expected that as young churches began to appear on the map (and before copies of the N.T. were available), "teething problems" amongst the congregations should occur. Paul's urgent epistles to the churches at Galatia, Rome and Corinth illustrate some of these problems but mainly the difficulty was with Judaizers; i.e. those Jewish Christians who mistakenly wanted to integrate substantial parts of the law of Moses into the Christian faith. Jewish Christians insisted that Gentile Christians be circumcised, keep the sabbath and various other items of the law. Indeed they considered that the gospel was exclusively for Jews (and this may well be true when we remember that it required a miraculous vision to make the apostle Peter preach to Gentiles). Paul regarded Judaizers as perverts of the gospel and in his letter to the Galatians places the curse of God upon all perverters of the gospel; repeating the curse for emphasis, **"and so I say again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."** (1:9). Four-fifths of the letter to the Galatians is taken up with Paul's response to Judaizers and to show that **"a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ"** (2:16), and that **"if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."** This was a strong argument, of course. What was the point in Christ being born, indeed crucified, if men could be justified by the Mosaic law? In Chapter 3 Paul asks some very searching questions of those unwilling to relinquish the law; e.g. **"This only would I learn of you. Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit and worketh miracles among you; doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"** Surely in seeking to answer these questions, Judaizers would have to admit that, at that time, God's preferences lay with the **faith** (the gospel) rather than with "the law" of Moses, and that the miracles (and other supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit) came by **faith and not the law.**

Paul also stressed that man's salvation came **not by law** but **BY PROMISE** and that that promise came to us via **Abraham** and not Moses, because the promise (that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed) was made to Abraham 430 years before Moses ever existed. Thus we are all the children of Abraham (and of God) through faith in Christ Jesus; based on a **promise** given to Abraham; and nothing whatsoever to do with a **law** given to Moses (3:7). And Paul adds, elsewhere (Rom. 4:9) that when Abraham found favour with God by his acts of faith, such favour was bestowed more than 20 years before he was ever circumcised. Thus today, as in Paul's day, we gain favour with God by faith (a faith as strong as Abraham's), and that favour is not based in any way whatsoever upon law, or Moses, or circumcision. And so, Paul could say in the closing verses of Galatians, **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but A NEW CREATURE"** (6:15).

Paul also used arguments based upon the 'Old' and 'New' Covenants. Oftentimes God had predicted, in the O.T., the coming of a **New Covenant**, which would be much superior to the old. Paul states (Heb. 8:6-13) that these prophecies had been fulfilled in his day. The New Covenant had arrived. Plainly God's employment of the word "New" meant that Moses' Covenant was now "Old" and would pass away. Christ came **"to take away the first (Covenant) that He might establish the second."** (Heb. 10:9). Christ took the law out of the way **"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). These words must be difficult to misunderstand. God has **"blotted out"** the law and **"taken it out of the way."** In Heb. 8:11 Paul says **"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.”**

Faced with the strength of such language, those who wish to retain parts of Moses' law have tried to short-circuit Paul's unequivocal words by claiming that the law can be split up into compartments; e.g. "The Moral Law;" "The Ceremonial Law" and "The Judicial Law" and that the "Moral Law" remains. Paul seemed completely unaware of such distinctions, and certainly the N.T. **never ever** mentions them. Some Commentators have also said that the "Ten Commandments" were never abrogated but were intended for all men for all time. This is, of course, a nonsense for the Decalogue (10 Commandments) was **never ever** given to Gentiles, and indeed the first 4 of the 10 Commandments could never have been obeyed by Gentiles. Today we are not subject to the Decalogue, or any item of the Mosaic Law, but are liberated by the "Law of Christ"; and we abstain from stealing, adultery, bearing false witness, killing, coveting (and much more) **not because of the 10 Commandments** but because such things are **prohibited in the N.T.** by Christ and His inspired apostles. Have you noticed that those who wish to retain parts of Moses' law are very selective? It's quite common for them to want to keep the Sabbath, instrumental music, tithing and such like, but I've yet to meet the man who advocates the retention of circumcision.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

In view of Paul's severe strictures on Judaizing Christians, and his comments on the law, it would seem a natural reaction for the Jews to ask **why** the Mosaic Law was not to continue. What then had been the purpose of the law? Paul anticipates the questions and says, "**Wherefore then serveth the law? It was ADDED BECAUSE OF TRANSGRESSIONS, UNTIL the seed should come, to whom the promise was made . . .**" (Gal. 3:6). Thus the law was temporary, which might seem a strange thing to say, given that it lasted almost 1,500 years, but such a period is not really a long time in God's eyes. It was to last UNTIL the coming of the Messiah: the One to whom the promise was made. It was ADDED because of transgressions; and was of value in that through its system of sacrifices, washings and purifications **it created an awareness of sin** (something plainly lacking in the world today). It also made men **accountable** for their actions.

The law was good and wholesome but was imperfect (i.e. incomplete) and was weak (Rom. 8:3). Its main weakness and incompleteness lay in the fact that although it could define sin, it could not remove sin. It was added because of transgressions and gave the people a consciousness of their sins. Without law sin is invisible. Paul said that "**Without law, sin was dead**" (Rom. 7:8) and admitted that he himself would not have recognised sin, as sin, without the law: (quoting the example of covetousness Rom. 7:7). Once a law is made sin springs to life: previously it has gone unnoticed. If no law exists, no law can be broken. "Sin" is a contravention of God's law: thus no law, no sin. Laws and rules can radically change a whole environment even although such rules are not God's but made by men. Apparently there was nothing wrong with praying to one's God until Daniel's enemies persuaded King Darius to make a law prohibiting it. Once this law was made the whole situation changed dramatically and Daniel would have certainly died but for the intervention of God. This obtains even in the most trivial things of life: e.g. parking laws suddenly appearing on streets previously free of them, etc. Men could pass the time away kicking a ball around and having good fun, but once laws and rules were made governing the game, referees were required (not only to interpret the rules but to punish those who contravened them).

Some have suggested that law not only defines sin, and quantifies it: but might also encourage it. Children might pass a building every day and scarcely notice it. Once a sign is attached to the building saying "No Entry" the children would seek an

early opportunity to trespass into it. This not a fault in law, or statute, but a quirk of human nature dating back, perhaps, to the Garden of Eden and 'forbidden fruit'.

Sin, however, requires to be shown up for the dreadful thing it is, and the law of Moses was able to do this albeit not, itself, **the remedy** for sin. The world had to wait until the coming of the Lamb of God, and the shedding of His precious blood. **"Wherefore"**, says Paul, **"The law was our SCHOOLMASTER to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."** (Gal.3:24). Thus the law was temporary and served its purpose well, but when the fulness of time was come it was replaced by "the hearing of faith." Paul says, **"BUT WHEN THE FULNESS OF TIME was come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law."** (Gal. 4:4). Moses' law could not redeem or restore.

### CONCLUSION

Space has gone and there is little room left for conclusions, but it does seem to be true that mankind does behave better under surveillance and supervision; whether in small things or large. I certainly remember the bedlam that used to prevail in our classroom at school if the teacher stepped out for a minute. And building site workers had a reputation at one time for playing cards all day in the site-hut when the foreman was away. This is another quirk of human nature, and we need law and we need supervision. Because Paul asserted that the law had gone, some Jews probably imagined that they could now do as they pleased. Paul anticipated this and explained that liberty did not mean licence. He said, **"Brethren, ye have been called to liberty: only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but BY LOVE, SERVE ANOTHER. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."** (Gal. 5:13). And so, "the law of Christ" is not codified and systematised like the law of Moses was, but is enshrined in these few simple but ageless words, **"Love God, and thy neighbour as thyself"** which, if we endeavour to do, we shall not go so very far wrong. Peter, likewise assuring the early Christians of liberty, exhorted them to sobriety and discretion **"not using their liberty as a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God, Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King."** (1 Peter 2:16).

EDITOR.