

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

Vol. I., New Series.

APRIL, 1900.

Number 4.

The ideas of many are confused by the distinction between religion and morality. This confusion is sometimes aggravated by the stress the pulpit lays on the inadequacy of mere morality and its emphasis of the imperviousness of a moralist's self-satisfaction; a stress and emphasis occasionally expressed so incautiously as to be liable to the perversion of being interpreted as implication that morality may be a disadvantage and that, on the whole, it were better and more promising of a religious future to be immoral than to be moral. Of course it ought to be a commonplace that morality is always and everywhere better than immorality; perhaps it is the axiomatic character of this truth that occasions preachers sometimes to be unguarded in the impression they may make.

Religion is always moral, and immorality is always irreligious, wherever found. Obvious as is the truth, yet its statement is not superfluous; there is such a thing as unethical "religion," having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. There are not wanting instances to prove that one may be very scrupu-

lous in the observance of religious rites and even zealous in religious activities, with every appearance, too, of conscientiousness, and yet be anything but moral in life. A famous chronicler has been recently quoted as saying of a celebrated ecclesiastic "that he was far from truthful and naturally deceitful and covetous, but full of religion!"

But while *real* religion is always moral, morality is not always religious; there is a distinction between the two and one fitly called radical because it lies at the very root, indeed it lies nowhere else; so far as the visible expression is concerned, the difference is not easily discerned, in externalities morality and religion may well appear indistinguishable. The distinction lies beneath the surface and inheres in the motive prompting. No act is religious that is not rightly related to God, and none falls short of religion that is so related. Men distinguish between the sacred and the secular, but to the heart that really enthrones God nothing is secular, and hence we hear St. Paul saying, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Certainly there is nothing intrinsi-

word, which is received by faith, and wrought out in a life of loving obedience.

And finally James' definition of religion, 1: 27, is conceived in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. The worship, the ritual, the outer garb of the new dispensation is beneficence and purity, and these are the qualities which are constantly enjoined in the teaching as they are commended by the example of our Lord. (M. 6: 24, 7: 12, 25: 31f.)

THE DECALOGUE AND THE BEATITUDES.

The Decalogue and the Beatitudes are often associated in the mind. The character, the position, the prominence of each are sufficient to account for this, they will always be considered the representative documents of two great dispensations of the Kingdom of God. It is not likely that either will ever become obsolete. They are grounded in the character of man as man, irrespective of race, clime or period; as such they are the expression of fundamental principles applicable to everybody, everywhere, always; it seems impossible, therefore, for them to become ever antiquated, provincial or sectional. We cannot imagine a man of any age or country, that would not be amenable to the Decalogue, nor one to whom the Beatitudes could not be commended as worthy of his loftiest aspirations.

The two documents are not only associated and thus compared, but they are not infrequently contrasted. That there are differences, may go without saying; that there is contrast, is not by any means so certain; that a very common popular conception of the difference is erroneous, I feel perfectly sure. This conception regards the Decalogue as harsh and relentless, laying judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, aptly associated with the natural phenomena attending its promulgation—a stern strain fitly set to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning and earthquake; while the Beatitudes, on the other hand, came as gently as the day-dawn in the sky or the dew upon the grassy slopes where the multitude reclined to receive the benediction of love and grace.

In support of this sharp contrast we are reminded that the beloved disciple says, "The law was given by Moses but grace and

truth came by Jesus Christ." But I do not believe God ever promulgated a law that contained not grace, or that he ever gave grace that had not law at its base; and hence I do not understand the language of John, just quoted, as justifying the contrast it is cited to sustain, but rather as somewhat analogous to Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 3: 10, where speaking of substantially the same relation between the two dispensations, he says: "For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory which excelleth." Paul certainly cannot mean here to divest of glory the ministration written and engraven in stones—indeed, he asserts the contrary more than once in the immediate context—he speaks of it as of one glory eclipsed by a greater glory; so I understand John as assigning to Christ's mission not the only grace but the preëminent grace; he might have phrased it after Paul's fashion by saying: "For even the law graciously given had no grace, in comparison with the grace of Christ which excelleth."

But while there may not be contrast, there is marked difference. This appears very plain in the form; the Decalogue is predominantly negative, the Beatitudes altogether positive; the Decalogue forbids, condemning the wrong; the Beatitudes enjoin, approving the right. This difference of method may be illustrated by one father's saying, "Disobey me and I shall punish you," and another's, "Obey me and I shall reward you."

At the same time the converse of each is involved in each; the difference is mainly one of emphasis. In the one, the stress is on the evil of the wrong; in the other, on the good of the right. When the Decalogue prohibits and condemns the wrong, it implicitly approves and blesses the right; when the Beatitudes approve and bless the right, they implicitly prohibit and condemn the wrong. In saying Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God, is involved the implication, Accursed are the impure for they shall not see Him; Blessed the merciful for they shall obtain mercy, implies, Cursed are the unmerciful for they shall obtain it not.

Of one thing we are not left in any doubt and that is that our Lord who himself uttered the Beatitudes did not conceive himself as making a contrast with the law. There was never manifested by him any disposition to depreciate the law; in the very address

introduced by the Beatitudes, he uses the following language, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." The terms here are intensely strong. In modern phraseology it is about equivalent to saying, "The law even to the dotting of an i or the crossing of a t shall be as durable as the globe itself." The whole law shall be "filled full" and this "filfull-ment" was the purpose of his mission, he was to magnify and make it honorable.

His attitude to the law is illustrated by the exposition that he gives of it in certain specimen commands. "Thou shalt not kill," said the law, forbidding the overt act; causeless anger he expounded it to include, extending its scope to the secret impulse of the heart. "Thou shalt not commit adultery," said the Decalogue; his exposition asserts that the gloating eye of lust indexes the crime already committed!

The thoughtful student must conclude that if these expositions are fair illustrations of the law's meaning as it lay in the mind of Christ, he filled it quite full. It must be a very insensible soul indeed that does not echo the Psalmist's tribute to the law's scope when he said, Thy commandment is exceeding broad. This exposition is rendered all the more impressive by the recollection that, when given, the echoes of the Beatitudes had scarcely died out of the air. This closeness of contextual connection must of itself suggest an utter absence of such contrast as is often instituted.

If one will study the Beatitudes he will find that they are not at all inconsistent with their author's attitude towards the Decalogue. As has been already said, the form is different; the phraseology of the former sounds much more gentle because the appeal is a very different one. There is something exceedingly gracious in the recurrence of the word "Blessed" like a great benign keynote through the verses; but can one safely affirm that there is a relaxation of demands, a lowering of standard, a gentleness without firmness, or a blessedness without conditions? Let such as have been wont to magnify the "gracious freeness" of these beatitudes but make an honest effort to measure up to their standard, to meet their conditions; let such an one examine his claims to the

blessings pronounced, let him establish his personal title to the characteristics required, by satisfying even his own conscience that he is poor in spirit, pure in heart, meek, merciful, a mourner for sin, a hungerer and thirster after righteousness, reviled falsely for Christ's sake, persecuted for righteousness' sake! The result of such an effort, if an honest one, will convince him that if the law be exceeding broad, the Beatitudes are not conspicuously narrow. The man who can attain the standard of the latter will not be greatly embarrassed by the demands of the former. He that can justly claim the characteristics conditioning the Beatitudes will have exactly the spirit which can, and will, and must, keep the Decalogue; the law in him will be filled full; he will not feel its restraint because there will be in him no disposition to do the thing forbidden.

In this connection be it remembered that it is the *gospel* that says: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." This it says because it has regard not to the letter merely, but to the spirit—as one spirit underlies the whole law and every command therein, the violation of any one command evinces a disposition that violates all. This is the breadth of the view derived from the gospel dispensation, the dispensation of the spirit as compared with the letter. This fact condemns utterly the maudlin sentimentalism that would read into the gospel of Christ a sort of nerveless relaxation of righteousness, a lowering of God's holy standard, a perversion of grace so lawless as to be nearly akin to license. The gospel is gracious indeed, but it is not a lawless grace; through it there runs a law, not so much imposed from without by means of harsh edict of the letter in ordinances enacted as a hedge of prohibition to restrain rebellious impulse, but a law written by the Spirit of God upon fleshly tables of the heart; not a law *unto* life, but a law *of living*; finding its nearest analogy in the habitual, spontaneous activities and powers of the individual man in their natural play, or in the normal, regular action of the forces of nature so constant and uniform, *i. e.*, in what we call laws of mind, laws of body, laws of nature; not by compulsion from without, but by impulse from within: "I delight to do thy will O my God: Thy law is within my heart," a fulfilment of the prophecy, "I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts."

We cannot imagine a worthy son conscious of any restraint in the Fifth Commandment; he obeys the command, not because of any injunction of the law; he does so from the dictates of his own heart, otherwise he could not keep the commandment at all. The high-minded man respects the property rights of his fellows, the pure-souled reverences the home of his neighbor, the reverent hallows God's name, the religious observes God's day—and all, not because of the law from without but by virtue of the law within without reference to formal statutes. In this respect he is not under law but under grace, and sin hath no dominion over him; he is delivered from the law, having died to that wherein he was held, that he should serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. The grace, therefore, consists not in a relaxation of the law or a lowering of the standard of divine rectitude, not at all; the grace consists in writing the law in the heart so that its statutes become the normal regulative order of the new man; thus is the law magnified and made honorable. This was its goal when originally delivered; this its meaning as set forth by Christ in that wonderful summary: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbor as thyself." Or as the great Apostle said, even more summarily, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." When one has reached *this* standard, the law is *fulfilled*; the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount are simply illustrations of the character and spirit and conduct of that man, for whom and *in* whom, Christ has really and truly become the end of the law for righteousness.

The relation, then, between the Decalogue and the Beatitudes may not inaptly be likened to that between the morning star and the sun; both lights, a lesser and a greater; the one the herald of the other, the lesser losing itself in the greater which it heralds; fading, it is true, but not into darkness, fading into the fulness of day.

SAMUEL M. SMITH.