

SERMON LI

THE USE OF THE LAW

Tobias Crisp

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." {Gal.3:19}

Having, as near as I could, followed the apostle in extolling Christ, and reducing persons to him alone, for comfort and strength, I suppose some conceive I aim at abolishing the law; a jealousy which the apostle himself had in this text; I have therefore, on purpose, pitched hereon, to show the use of the law to believers, which the apostle comprises in these words. Now that you may the better observe his drift and meaning, consider that his watchful eye found the Galatians straggled by the seduction of the false apostles from the gospel of Christ, to the works of the law; hereupon he takes them to task, to reduce them back again to faith in Christ alone for justification; his main argument to prove justification by faith in the promises of Christ, is taken from the priority of them to the law; they being made before it, the strength of the argument lies in this; that God, to whom nothing can intervene, after he hath done an act, to make him recall it again, doth not make void the promise by the succeeding promulgation of the law; hence follow the objection and answer in my text; where the apostle shows an excellent use of the promulgation of the law, although it be not contrary to the promise.

The text consists of an objection, and an answer; the objection hath picked out of the premises a nullity of the law; the answer clears the premises from such gross absurdity. The objection imports, if life must still come by promise, in vain did God publish the law; the answer suggests, that though life be not the end of the law, yet there are other sufficient uses of it, requiring its promulgation; which uses the apostle mentions in that answer, showing that the law was published to be an appendix to the gospel, giving the reason why it was added to it, "because of transgression;" and then he adds the continuance of this use of the law, "until the seed should come, unto whom the promise was made."

The apostle's own conclusion, in his own terms, shall be all the doctrine we will observe from the words, which is this; "the law was added because of transgression, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made." Because of the obscurity herein, let us examine, what the apostle means by this, "the law was added;" what he intends by, "it was added because of transgression;" what is his meaning as to the duration of this use of the law, "till the seed should come;" and we shall then see how far forth the law stands in force to believers.

The addition of the law to the promises of life by Christ, imports a priority of the gospel to the law, both in its being, and its proper office; that is, that God at first established Christ by promise to be our life, and righteousness, before the law was on foot; for the addition of one thing to another supposes the thing to which the other was added, was in being before; this the apostle expressly affirms, when he saith, "that the promise was four hundred and thirty years before the law;" and from priority he infers, that the law, when it was delivered, was not promulgated in opposition to the promise, as if the law were to contest with the promise; for, when God hath once said a thing, he never contradicts himself; neither doth one act of his annihilate another; for he is not a man, that he should lie. Now if the law did contradict the gospel, they being both the voice of God, the matter would infer a lie, or falsehood in the former. If any say, that by this argument the ceremonial law must not be abolished, because it is God's act; I answer, that God ordained that to abide, but till

Christ came, the promise was established for ever; besides Christ contradicts not the ceremonial law, but is the complement of it.

This addition imports a principality in the promise of life by Christ, above the law; that is, the law was published for the gospel's sake, to be subservient, or as an handmaid to it, not the gospel to the law; as additions to a house are for more conveniency and benefit of a house, the house is not made for the conveniency of the addition; the gospel is the end of the law's publication, not the law of the gospel. Now, by how much the end of a thing is more noble, than the means conducing to the better accomplishing thereof, by so much hath the gospel a principality above the law; for Christ promised, as the apostle speaks, is the end of it. He is the end, not only in execution, but also in intention; that is, not only the end of it, fulfilling it, but also the ultimate end, at which the law points. It is true, it points indeed at wrath; but that is by accident, or as a second end; namely, if it fail of making men run to Christ.

This addition imports a consistence of the gospel, and of the law; that is, that they can well stand one by the other, without destroying each other, as additions can well stand by their principals. Their natures are not so contrary, considering the true use the law was intended for, but that they may well agree together, and both abide without destroying each other. In brief, by this phrase of addition, the apostle intimates that the law and promise are of different uses, but not contrary; therefore they may well stand together, to let us now consider what use it serves for; "it was added because of transgression." I confess there is an obscurity in the expression, for the phrase imports, that sin was before the law, which seems a strange speech, because where there is no law, there is no transgression; but I will clear it as fully as I can. Note therefore, the apostle speaks not here of the being of the law, but of the promulgation of it by Moses, which was a long time after the being of it. The law had its being from the time it was enacted, which was at the creation; and every aberration from that was a transgression, before this publication. But to come to the use of the law intended in this expression, {because of transgression,} this expression imports that, therefore; God published the law anew, because, before Moses, it being only written in man's heart, through his corruption it began to be so obliterated, that a little more would quite have defaced it; so that transgression would not appear to be transgression. Therefore God revives the law, that, by making it so conspicuous, transgression also against it, might be apparent in its proper hue; for, when the law comes fresh, sin revives. Hence it is that God did not only publish it anew, but also wrote it in tables of stone, that it might last fresh perpetually; this, then, is one use of it, to show man his transgression, which he could never take notice of, but by looking in this clear glass, that represents all his wrinkles and spots to the life.

It is added because of transgression; that is, it is set up to keep men from transgression, for *rectum est sui index et oblique*, {that is, justice defines both the just and the unjust.} Now, supposing the law almost obliterated, were it not revived, man should not be able to distinguish what is good and what is evil; now the law renewed, propounding to man what is good and acceptable to God, by looking hereinto he shall see what will please, and what displease; when he doth well, and when he fails; so that it serves for a rule of life, and a discernor of aberrations.

It imports, that the law was added, that when man transgresses, he may know what to expect from it, if he have no other refuge; to wit, the curse attending every person that continues not in all things written therein. The sum is, it serves to revive sin, to be a rule to avoid it, and to discover wrath to sinners; all which may, and doth well consist with, nay, is subservient to the promise of Christ; for Christ will not seem worth anything; nay, men will turn away their faces from him, the law discovers them to be transgressors, yea, and subject to God's wrath for it; as, blood-guiltiness pursued, made the city of refuge acceptable, and the man-slayer to hasten thereto, which otherwise might have stood as a neglected place; Christ, as a physician, is only welcome when need calls for him.

Again the rules and precepts of the law are very subservient unto Christ, as they adorn the life with a conversation beseeming a companion of Christ, who calls us not unto uncleanness, but holiness. Now had we not directions from the law, men would live as they list; believers would be

rather monsters than men; the law, in the tales of it, being holy and good, maintains a part fitting our communion with Christ. Some may say, if that be transgression still, which the law makes so, and those the rules of duty still, and that curse in force still unto such breach of those precepts, seeing, in many things, we all transgress those rules, the curse also lies on us still, and then where is life by Christ?

I answer, that, in respect of those that are still under the law, all this is true; so saith the apostle, "they are under the curse." {Gal.3:10} But so many as are within the covenant of grace, the law propounds but the desert of such transgression it intends, not the execution of it upon them; for then it should directly contradict the covenant of promise before made, which proved to be impossible. You will say then, that the use of the curse of the law is made void. I answer, that at the second publishing of the law, the execution of the curse could not be intended, because of the contradiction before mentioned in the first institution. Indeed it was intended, but Christ hath borne it; and so, though he hath not utterly avoided it, because he endured it, yet he hath translated it from us; as a Surety, by paying a debt, discharges the principal. But, yet there is some use of the curse intended in the second promulgation, even to those whom the covenant of grace belongs; namely, to drive them quickly out of themselves to Christ, as the fire that was coming to Sodom, though it was not sent to destroy Lot, yet it served to hasten him out of Sodom.

I come next to examine the duration of the law, in the uses before mentioned, which the apostle expresses thus, "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." There is some obscurity in this expression, for it seems by this, seeing Christ is the seed, therefore this law must remain but till he come; whereas the apostle professeth, that he seeks not to make void, but to establish the law by this doctrine. Let us therefore, consider, what he means by this, "till the seed should come." The seed of Abraham, in respect of the promise, whereof the apostle here speaks, is taken two ways, for the person of Christ; "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;" and for the children of Abraham, according to faith; to wit, the company of all believers to the end of the world, "I will be the God of thee, and of thy seed after thee." Now, if you understand by the seed here, the person of Christ, then conceive the meaning thus; that the law in the utmost rigor of it, is in force against man, till Christ come, and take it upon himself; but, by seed here, we may understand Christ mystical, consisting of himself the head, and the faithful his members; and so the law continues till that come; that is, till the whole body of Christ be made complete, by an actual subsistence of every member in him. Now this seed will not be wholly complete, till the consummation of all things. Indeed, the words immediately following gives no little intimation that he understands seed thus; for it is the seed to whom the promise, to wit, of justification and life by Christ, was made; which cannot be understood of Christ personally, but of his mystical members; so then the law continues to point out the wrath due for transgressions; for so long as Christ hath any seed upon earth, the law is to hunt men into Christ, their rock of safety; and, another end is, for a rule to order their conversation in him.

Some, it may be, will object, that all this while it seems that Christ hath not freed us from being under the law, whereas the apostle saith, "ye are not under the law, but under grace." I answer, that in respect of the rules of righteousness, or the matter of obedience, we are under the law still; or else we are lawless, to live every man as seems good in his own eyes, which I know no true Christian dares so much as think; for Christ hath given no new law diverse from this, to order our conversation aright by; besides, we are under the law, to know what is transgression, and what is the desert of it. You will say, what then is the liberty which the apostle there speaks of? I answer, having thus showed how far the law is in force, I will now show you what liberty we have from the primary intention of the law. The law, as it was a rule of life, so was it the only way to life; a long and hard way, nay, through man's fall, an impossible way, insomuch, as there can be no access to life by it; and this end of it is abolished by Christ, who now is the only true way to life; so that none comes to the Father, but by Christ alone; a believer is not tied to seek life by his obedience to the law, but by his faith in Christ. The law was an executioner to avenge itself on trespassers; it had a curse like a sting in the tail of it, but Christ hath redeemed his from this curse, being made a curse for them, enduring the severity of that wrath, which their sins deserved; so that although in many things they offend all, yet God lays on

Christ the iniquities of them all, by whose stripes they are healed. The law stood upon exact and perfect obedience to every jot and tittle, for matter, measure, time, an end of every particular duty required; so that if there happened but the least error, though out of mere forgetfulness, or any kind of weakness, it would not own or take notice of the most exact care and endeavour, but all must be quite lost. The rigor also hath Christ taken from the law, insomuch, as weak performances, if they be sincere, are accepted in Christ the beloved. The apostle making use of that prophecy in Isaiah concerning the acceptable time when the Redeemer should come, applies it thus, till the time that grace comes. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." {II Cor.6:2}

So again, showing the excellency of Christ's gospel above the law, he concludes, "wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear;" {Heb.12:28;} and in Rom.14:18, the same apostle saith, "he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God." So again, having said, "for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things;" {Rom.11:36;} he tells us in chapter 12:1, that the presenting of our bodies a living sacrifice, which is one reasonable serving of him, is both a "holy and acceptable service unto God;" for "in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me; there will I accept them;" there "will I accept you, with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen;" {Ez.20:41,41;} which is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ.

The law meeting with the corrupt nature of man, though in its own nature it be holy and good, yet, accidentally, it had an irritating and enraging power; man's heart would be the more upon sin, because of the restraints of the law, as a wild bull in a net; *nimitur in vetitum*, {that is, we try to get what has been forbidden for us, and we always want whatever we have been refused,} the more we are prohibited, the more by nature do our fingers itch. But Christ so crucifies the flesh, that he kills this itch, which made Paul say, "I am dead unto the law;" not only the condemning, but also the irritating power of it; instead of hankerings and shifts, and propensities to sin, Christ raiseth indignations against what the law forbids.

The law calls for bricks, but allows no straw; for obedience, but supplies no succor to help our infirmities; it saith, "do this, and live," but leaves a man to shift as well as he can, the work being infinitely beyond man's reach, it is impossible but he must sink under the burden; this is that which makes duty so harsh, uncouth, and unsavory to many; for they look on it as a tiring thing; but this rigor hath Christ also taken away, promising never to fail; "fear thou not; {saith Christ;} for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." {Is.41:10} Christ will cause the lame to leap, the dumb to sing; he will carry the weary in his bosom, give them wings to mount, and strengthen them when they faint; he furnishes with talents to trade with; he affords seed where he looks for a harvest.