

# LECTURE XXX.

## LAW.

### SYLLABUS.

1. In what senses is the word Law used in Scripture?  
See Concordances and Lexicons.
2. Is the law of God written on the natural conscience intuitively? What the authority of this natural law? Is the Decalogue of Moral or of Positive obligation?  
See Turretin, Loc. ix, Qu. 1, 2. Sensualistic Philosophy of 19th Cent., ch. 12. Dick, Lect. 102.
3. If the Covenant of Works is now inapplicable for us, what uses has the law in a plan of salvation by grace?  
Turretin, Qu. 22, 25. Calvin, bk. ii, ch. 7. Ridgely, Qu. 94-97.
4. Recite the origin of the Decalogue. How is it divided? What are the principles on which it is to be interpreted?  
Calvin, bk. ii, ch. 8. Turretin, Qu. 5, 6. Dick, Lect. 102, 103. Ridgely, Qu. 98, 99.
5. Is the Decalogue a perfect rule of life? Did Christ abrogate or amend any part of it?  
Turretin, Qu. 3, 4. Dick as above. Dr. Ashbel Green's Lect. 34-36, on Shorter Catechism.

**T**HE word "Law," (תּוֹרָה, νόμος) is employed in the Scripture with a certain latitude of meaning, but always carrying the force of meaning contained in the general idea of a regulative principle. First, it sometimes expresses the whole of Revelation, as in Ps. i : 2. Second, the whole Old Testament, as in Jno. x : 34. Third, frequently the Pentateuch, as in Luke xxiv : 44. Fourth, the preceptive moral law (Prov. xxviii : 4 ; Rom. ii : 14. Fifth, the ceremonial code, as in Heb. x : 1. Sixth, the decalogue, Matt. xxii : 36-40. Seventh, a ruling power in our nature, as in Rom. vii : 23. Eighth, the covenant of works, Rom. vi : 14. By the Law, in the following discussions, we intend the preceptive moral law, as epitomized in the decalogue.

The student will be prepared to expect my answer to the second point, from what has been taught of the eternity of moral distinctions. These are intrinsic in that class of acts. They are not instituted solely by the positive will of God, but are enjoined by that will because His infinite mind saw them to be intrinsic and eternal. In a word: Duties are not obligatory and right solely because God has commanded them; but He has commanded them because they are right. Hence, we confidently expect to find the natural powers of reason and conscience in man impressed with the moral distinction, and pronouncing it intuitively.

(a.) From the fact that the Scriptures represent God Himself, at least in one particular, as bound by this distinction of right and wrong, "God cannot lie;" that is, the eternal perfections of His own mind so regulate His own volitions that His will certainly, yet freely, refuses all error. See also 2 Tim. ii: 13.

(b.) The very nature of a creature implies rightful subjection to a Creator; its denial would be utter contradiction. Thus the law of our reason teaches us, that the creature existing, these moral relations cannot but exist, whether God has published them in positive precepts, or not.

(c.) If these moral distinctions owed their origin solely to God's positive will, no distinction could be drawn between moral and positive precepts. The prohibition, "Thou shalt not bear false witness," would be exactly like this: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk." But there is a distinction between the two classes, recognized by God and our reason. 'Judgment, mercy, and truth,' are pronounced 'weightier matters of the law,' compared with tithing mint, anise, and cummin.

(d.) If there were no cause, save God's mere will, why moral distinctions were drawn as they are, He might have made treachery a virtue, and truth a crime, &c. Against this every moral intuition revolts. Why might not God have done this? The only answer is, that His own unchangeable moral perfections made it impossible. Just so; it is admitted that the basis of the moral distinction is a *priori* to all volition of God; which is substantially my proposition. And last, and most conclusively: If God's mere positive volition made an act of the creature morally right, then of course God must be morally right in entertaining that volition. But the moral character of volitions depends wholly on that of the principles which prompt them. So that, we see, if there were no moral distinction *a priori* to God's mere will, God could have no moral character in acts of His will.

The moral distinction being then intrinsic and eternal, it follows that the intuition and feeling of its obligation must be one of the natural endow-

Consequences.

ments of the rational creature made in God's image. This obligation must be recognized by man's conscience as natural and moral, and not merely positive. To this agree the Scriptures, Rom. i: 19-21; ii: 14, 15; Acts xiv: 17. And these declarations are confirmed by the *consensus populi* upon the existence of a moral obligation, and its main outlines, by a multitude of the facts of our consciousness, by the admissions of Pagans. But here, the distinction so clearly made between moral *principia* and *conclusiones*, must be noted. In some cases of moral obligation, the perception and verdict of conscience are immediate. In other cases, they are deductive. Should a creature obey its Creator? To this the sane reason answers intuitively, Yes. Should the borrower pay any hire for the use of money? To this the mind can only answer deductively; certain premises must be known to the understanding, from which the moral answer must be by deduction drawn.

If the moral distinction is thus eternal in acts, unchangeable in God, and natural in man, the preceptive law receives a new dignity, immutability, and sacredness. Then it follows, also, that the natural conscience is God's viceregent in man; and its dictates must be obeyed, or guilt arises. But when we remember that the light in man's conscience is imperfect, we see that it is not true that this faculty is a sufficient rule of duty. That rule is found in God's precepts alone. The seeming paradox arising out of the dictate of an ill-informed conscience has been already considered, in lecture X.

It has been asked, if the Law can no longer be a covenant of life to fallen sinners, what place and use can it properly have in a plan of salvation by grace? You are aware that three have been, in the Church, errorists called Antinomians, who, in fact, sought to exclude the law from their system, asserting that since it is no longer a term of life, since it has been fully satisfied both in its preceptive and penal demands by the believer's divine Substitute, it can have no binding force upon, and no application to him. But the view I have given of the Law, as the necessary and unchanging expression of God's rectitude, shows that its authority over moral creatures is unavoidable. If God reveals Himself to them, He cannot but reveal Himself as He is. Just these precepts are the inevitable expression of a will guided by immutable perfections. It is therefore simply impossible that any dispensation, of whatever mercy or grace, could have the effect of abrogating righteous obligation over God's saints. God's mercy through a Redeemer satisfying justice, may lift off the curse of the law for transgression; but it is impossible that it should abrogate rightful authority. The Law then must remain, under every dispensation, the authoritative declaration of God's character.

3. Uses of Law under Covenant of Grace—The Law Immutabile.

A second essential use of the Law under the New Covenant, is that which Gal. iii : 24 states : "The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." By showing us our penal debt, and the high terms of the covenant of works, now impossible for the sinner to fulfill, it prepares his soul to submit to the righteousness of the Redeemer. A third, and equally essential use appears to the believer, after his adoption. He is "chosen in Christ that he should be holy"; "redeemed from all iniquity to be Christ's peculiar people, zealous of good works." This great end, the believer's sanctification, can only be attained in practice, by giving him a holy rule of conduct. Such a rule is the Law. It is to be as assiduously observed, as the guide to that holiness which is the fruit of adoption, as though its observance could earn adoption. A fourth important purpose of the publication of the Law in the Church, appears in this; that its precepts restrain the aboundings of sin. They partially instruct the consciences even of the unregenerated. They guide secular laws, and thus lay a foundation for a wholesome civil society. And last: the publication of the Law is preparatory for that use which God will make of it in the Judgment Day, for the conviction of His enemies. He is now, in every such message, preparing to close the mouths of the disobedient in that day.

For these reasons, the preaching and expounding of the Law is to be kept up diligently, in every gospel Church.

The whole decalogue is found written out in full, in two places of the Bible; besides a number of other places, where one or more of the precepts is cited. These places are Exodus xx : 2 to 17, and Deut. v : 6 to 21. It is the doctrine of the Catechism, that these "Ten Words" were intended to be a summary of man's whole duty. Why, it may be asked, is so much made of them? Why not make equal account of some few verses taken from the Proverbs, or the Sermon on the Mount? We reply: the manner of their publication plainly showed that God intended to give them the peculiar importance we assign them. They were uttered by Him, to His Church, in an audible voice, *εις διαταγας ἀγγέλων*, (Acts vii : 53), with the terrible adjuncts of clouds, and thunders, and lightnings, and the sound of a trumpet. They were the only parts of Revelation thus spoken. "These words Jehovah spake unto all your assembly in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and the thick darkness; with a great voice; and He added no more," Deut. v : 22. None of the ceremonial nor civic rules were thus distinguished. These ten precepts were then graven by God Himself on two tables of stone; the imperishable material signifying the perpetuity of the laws—and these tab-

4. Decalogue God's Summary of Duty.

les were to be kept among the most sacred things of their religion. Christ, in giving that summary of man's duty into the two precepts of love to God, and love to man, is evidently abridging the Decalogue. He says that on these two abridged commands, hang all the law and the prophets. Therefore all the Old Testament hangs on the Decalogue, of which these two are the epitome. These are the grounds, together with the obvious comprehensiveness and perfection of the ten precepts, (which will be evinced in their exposition) on which the Jewish and Christian Churches have always held this Decalogue to be designed as the epitome of the whole Law.

Expositors have not been entirely agreed in the division of the Decalogue. Some would have it, that five precepts belonged to the first table, and five to the second. This opinion seems to be dictated only by a fondness for mechanical symmetry. It is now generally held, that four precepts composed the first table, and six the second. This is the natural division. Of the duties enjoined in the first four, God is the direct object: of those inculcated in the last six, man is the direct object. Thus we conform our division to our Saviour's summary, love to God and love to man. Some have supposed that they found an evidence of this division in the words of the Apostle Paul, when he calls the fifth the "first commandment with promise." It is observed that this is not the first containing a promise, if the first table be included; whence they suppose that the Apostle calls it first, with reference to the second table, at the head of which it stood.

It remains that we settle the principles upon which the decalogue is to be interpreted and applied. If it is an epitome of duty, it contains of course more than the formal propositions in which it is verbally expressed. The first and most important of those principles is that announced by St. Paul in the 7th of Romans: 'The Law is spiritual.' It claims to regulate, not only the acts, but the desires and thoughts, the inner as well as the outer man. For farther proof, note that Christ, in His exposition (Matt. v.) expressly extends the prohibitions to the secret motions of the heart towards sin. Causless anger is declared to be the soul's sin of murder; lust is the soul's adultery; coveting, as Paul indicates, is the soul's theft. I prove the same rule from this: that Christ resolves all duties into love, which is an inward state of affection. And last, the same rule must follow from the spiritual nature of the God whose law it is. He claims to be the 'Searcher of Hearts.' He judgeth not by the outward appearance. 'He requireth truth in the inward parts.' The law of such a being must apply chiefly to the inward affections, as our reason approves.

Second: In each precept, the chief duty or sin is taken as

The Sin or Duty Named is Representative. representative of the various lesser duties or sins of that class; and the overt act is taken as representative of all related affections, and under it they are all enjoined or forbidden. Thus, our Saviour teaches us that under the head of murder, angry thoughts and abusive words are also forbidden. We are authorized by such examples to conclude that under the one precept, 'Thou shalt not kill,' all offences against our fellow-men's lives, safety, and personal welfare, are forbidden. So of the other commandments. This follows from the fact that the decalogue is a summary.

3. To command a given class of duties plainly implies a prohibition of the opposite class of sins, and *vice versa*. Thus: Injuries against the life and person of fellows are forbidden; this implies the obligation of active efforts to protect them, as we have opportunity. This follows from the practical scope of the law. What is the design or intent of the sixth commandment? Obviously to secure our fellows the enjoyment of life and safety. If, then, the obligation is adequate to the practical end, it must include active efforts to promote, as well as refraining from injuring, that end. This is confirmed by our Saviour's summation: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Hence, while the 6th commandment says, "Thou shalt not kill;" it also means, "Thou shalt save thy fellow from killing."

4. When anything is commanded or forbidden, the regular and necessary means and incitements thereto are also commanded or forbidden. And when any duty of one party towards another is enjoined, the relative state or duty thereto is also enjoined on the second party towards the first.

5. The precepts of the first table, containing duties towards God, are superior in obligation to the second table, towards man. See Luke xiv : 26 ; Matt. v : 37 ; Acts iv : 19 ; Eph. vi : 1. Whenever the authority of man clashes with that of God, the former must therefore give way. But moral duties, though they be duties of the second table, are superior to mere positive or ceremonial duties of the first table. See Matt. xii : 7 ; Prov. xxi : 3.

Last. The prohibitory precepts bind us equally at all times; the mandatory, only when the proper objects of the duty are present. The precept "Thou shalt not kill," binds at every moment; the command, "Honour thy father and mother," only binds when we bear suitable relations to some superior.

Many Socinians and Abolitionists, and some Papists, in order to support favourite prejudices, strenuously assert that the moral law, as given to the Jews, was an imperfect rule, and was completed and perfected by Jesus Christ. We

5. The Law Perfect — Christ made no Changes of Substance, because Immutable.

Prohibitions Perpetual, &c.

God before Man: Moral Precepts before Positive.

Means Included in Duties.

Commandment Implied in Prohibition, &c.

grant, indeed, that Christ freed this law from the corrupt glosses of tradition, and that He showed the true extent of its application. But we deny that He made any change or substantial addition. We admit that He carried it farther in the way of detail, but we deny that He corrected anything of its principle. These errorists pretend to claim this as an honour to Jesus Christ and His mission, and as evincing His superiority over Moses. They hereby do Him dishonour. For the decalogue is as much Christ's law as the Sermon on the Mount. He was the authoritative agent for giving both. For it was "with the Angel which spake unto him in Mount Sinai," (Christ, Acts vii : 38) that Moses "received these lively oracles to give unto us." Second: It would be dishonorable to a perfect God to suppose that He would reveal to His chosen people, as a rule of righteousness, a law which allowed some sin. Then, all the holiness produced under that law was spurious. Third: God forbade that the law should receive addition. Deut. iv : 2 ; xii : 32. Fourth: Christ honoured this law, declared it everlasting and unchangeable, and said that He came not to destroy, but to fulfil it. Fifth: Christ says that on His abridgments of this law hang all the law and the prophets. And last: St. Paul, having resolved the precepts of this decalogue into the one principle of love (Rom. xiii : 9), verse 10th says: "Love is fulfilling of the law." This is said by this minister of the new dispensation. And both the Old and New Testaments assert the perfection of this Old Testament law. See Ps. xix : 7 ; Rom. vii : 12 ; Ps. cxix : 96.

In further support of this view, I remark that the very particulars in which it is pretended Jesus amended, softened, and completed the moral law, are stated just as distinctly, although perhaps not as forcibly in all cases, by Moses and the prophets, in their expositions of the decalogue. E. g., the love of enemies, in Matt. v : 44 ; see it in Exod. xxiii : 4, 5, Levit. xix : 18. The great laws of love of Matt. xxii : 37, &c. ; see Deut. vi : 4, 5, Levit. xix : 18. The command of benevolence to strangers in Luke x : 36, 37 : see it in Levit. xxiv : 22, xxv : 35, Deut. x : 19. The spiritual interpretation of the law, as embracing not only outward acts, but the thoughts and desires of the heart ; see Levit. xix : 17, 18, Deut. xi : 13, Ps. xxiv : 4, li : 6. Christ's new commandment (Jno. xiii : 34) was only "the old command renewed," only a re-enactment with an additional motive: Christ's love for us. Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, then, and other places, rebukes and corrects, not the law itself, nor the Old Testament interpretations of the law, but the erroneous and wicked corruptions foisted upon it by traditions and Pharisaic glosses. The moral law could not be completed, because it is as perfect as God, of whose character it is the impress and transcript. It cannot be abrogated or relaxed, because it is as immutable as He.

Precepts of New Testament also in Old.