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## The Pulpit.

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### SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

TEXT: MATTHEW 5, 20—26.

During the reading of our text, the thought may have occurred to some of you: why is it that we find Christ devoting so much time to the Law, or, rather, to promulgating laws which to many seemed new and strange? Is Christ to be viewed in the light of a new lawgiver after Moses?

Surely such a conception of the Savior robs the name of Jesus, robs it of that which makes it sweet in the sinner's ear. Then we should indeed have to look upon Him as our father Luther was taught to view Him by his Romish teachers; namely, as the stern Judge who gauges all things according to the standard of God's Law. Then sinful mortals would indeed be constrained to flee from Him just as the Children of Israel fled from the mountain when the Lord thundered forth His Law; just as they fled from the face of Moses himself after he appeared from Sinai. As a lawgiver, issuing commands which no man can fulfil, He loses His character of Savior who says to men disquieted and afflicted by the Law of Moses: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." It cannot be, then, that Christ is a new lawgiver or, at least, one who sharpened the exactions of the Mosaic Law. He himself disclaims coming to destroy the Law or to teach one that is new. "I am come to fulfil," says He.

But what can be His purpose in interpreting the Law of Moses and in showing the people how the Pharisees, the scribes, and the lawyers had put a wrong construction upon it? Why is He so greatly concerned about this, that man should have the correct understanding of this Law?

No one will deny that it is Christ who has shown us the true sense and import of this Law in all it embraces. What His purpose is in so doing, our text may help us to discover. Just as it is He, who teaches us the true meaning of the Law, so it is He who would show us the true use of the Law. Upon the basis of our text let us discuss

THE THREEFOLD USE OF THE LAW.

- I. *As a curb;*
- II. *As a mirror;*
- III. *As a rule.*

I.

“The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8, 21) was the verdict which God was obliged to pass upon the whole human family, and Jesus continues in the same strain when He says: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murder, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” The heart of man or his innermost nature is, therefore, as some one has well expressed it, “a nest of vipers where all these hideous crimes lie incipient, awaiting but an opportunity to break forth into the light of day, a tinder-box of all shames, needing but the spark of temptation and occasion to flame up and burst forth into fiery passions.” Were this evil nature, inherent in every man, allowed to have full sway, language would fail to describe the fearful deluge of open sin and iniquity that would drown the world. There are indeed men, anarchists and communists of all shades and opinions, who would do away with all restraint that has been put upon man and allow him to give free rein to all his passions, thinking thus to make every person infinitely happy. A doctrine fraught with more terrible results for humanity could not be imagined. Such a course would amount to instituting hell upon earth and in the eternal destruction of almost every soul. Such doctrine is not of God whose Law is to be a curb, a check to man’s evil nature.

The Pharisee mentioned in our text led to all appearances an honorable life, observing, for instance, the injunction, "thou shalt not kill," most diligently and faithfully, in so far as this command formed part of the code of laws regulating external conduct. This strict observing of the Law was characteristic of the Pharisees, for they were most punctilious in keeping the letter of the Law together with the injunctions of the elders thought to be based thereon. They consequently acquired a great reputation for holiness. In fact, the very name "Pharisee" means "one that is separate from," since they regarded themselves and were looked upon by others as being separate from the common herd, from the ordinary run of people who made no special pretensions to holiness. Many of them, as we have learned to know, were hypocrites; none of them, while they remained members of this sect, found anything congenial to their taste in the doctrine of Christ.

It must be noticed that Christ does not condemn in itself this external observance of the Law. He does not say: "But I say unto you: Whosoever shall kill, shall *not* be in danger of the judgment." He allows the Law to stand: "Whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of judgment," and intimates that those who obey this Law insofar as it prohibits the actual deed of murder, have, indeed, a kind of righteousness. Of the Pharisees who understood the Law in this way He speaks when He says to His disciples: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, etc." He does indeed apply the term "righteousness" to their observance of the Law, although, of course, this righteousness was not sufficient for the purpose for which they sought it.

There are many to-day who obey God's Law as did the Pharisees of old and thus acquire a kind of righteousness. It is the will of God that it should be so and His Law was given that it might be in the world acting as a curb upon man's evil inclinations. Thus the Law: "Thou shalt not

kill," together with the penalty attached thereto: "Who-soever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment," keeps many a man from giving vent in deed to his anger, to his hatred, to the desire for vengeance that rages in his heart. In conformity with the purpose of God this Law is found written in the statute-books or forming part of the unwritten right of all nations. Therefore, also, is it found engraven upon the hearts of even unbelievers, so that the accusation of "thou shalt not kill" voiced by his conscience within him has driven many a murderer to seek to still this tormenting accuser either by voluntarily surrendering himself to punishment, or by inflicting the death penalty upon himself. According to the purpose of God it is, therefore, right and proper that those who are in authority should sit in judgment, pass sentence, and execute wrath upon those who break this Law.

Thus we see that God's Law is in force and power against even unbelievers, binding them to lead lives honorable in the sight of man if they would avoid falling into the hands of God's ministers, the government, that executes wrath upon those who do evil, that is, who break the Law in outward deed. Thus God has interposed His Law as an effective curb keeping in restraint the evil will of man.

If it is required of the unregenerate worldling that he in so far do the will of God, what must be said of those who call themselves Christians and yet in many ways show their contempt for the Law of God by refusing to obey the laws of the government under which they live, by evading the penalties while making use of unlawful means to satisfy their greed, gratify their hatred, and still their desire for revenge? Their righteousness instead of being *better* is *worse* than that of the scribes and Pharisees! Woe unto them!

## II.

That with this application of the Law its use is not exhausted, our text leads us to see in that the Law is held

up as a *mirror*. To make use of the Law in this way, as the text directs, man must have more than a mere superficial knowledge of the same. He who does not penetrate into its inner meaning and then makes use of this Law as the mirror in which to view himself and all his deeds, will become a selfsatisfied and selfrighteous Pharisee when he finds that outwardly he has lead an honorable life. He will never view himself in this mirror as he really is and will not see that he is a child of wrath who is in danger of judgment and of hellfire. Such was the case with the scribes and Pharisees. With their scant, shallow knowledge of the Law they undertook to view themselves therein in order to form an estimate of themselves and their works. Naturally they were well satisfied with the outcome, for they saw in themselves paragons of holiness and were esteemed such by the people. Hence they fell into the sin of selfrighteousness and were pointed out by Christ as men whose holiness fell far short of making them children of the kingdom of heaven. The righteousness of those who would be heirs of the kingdom must exceed, surpass, go farther than that of the scribes and Pharisees, and the mirror in which they view themselves must be truer and clearer than that used by these deluded men.

The clearer and more highly polished the mirror, the better will it show every blemish in the face of the beholder. When then this mirror in which man is to view himself is used, it must be bright and clear. The deep, spiritual meaning of the Law must be laid bare as Christ does here for His disciples, would man view in the same the real worth of his deeds, words, and thoughts. Christ, therefore, shows His disciples that this Law damns not only every deed that is contrary to it, but even every word, yea every thought that is a transgression thereof. Its penalty will be paid not only by the red-handed murderer, but whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of judgment; whosoever shall say to his brother

“Raca,” that is, unjustly and angrily belittle and bemean him, shall be in danger of the council, that is, of punishment; whosoever shall say “Thou fool,” angrily curse and contemn his brother, shall be in danger of hellfire; yea even he who thinks that he can worship God by bringing his gifts to the altar, although his brother hath something against him, will find that his gift is an abomination unto the Lord. Therefore, he who has the mirror of the Law as the Lord God made it, who understands it and its requirements as Christ exhibits them in our text, will find that he can never render that righteousness which is better than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, sufficient unto entering into the kingdom of God. He then feels that it is indeed the purpose of God to judge every thought and word according to the Law and to condemn eternally those who cannot stand before His searching judgment; that he, sinner as he now knows himself to be, can never enter the kingdom of heaven, but must be banished into the pit of hell, though perchance he has not with deed of hand broken the Law. He realizes then that the judge will hand him over to the officer, and he will be cast into prison to remain forever, since never can he pay the debt of obedience of which he has robbed God. To such a man the Law is indeed a mirror showing him all the hideous blemishes that make his soul hateful in the sight of God. Far from causing him to be lifted up with selfrighteousness and pride, it humbles him in the dust before the Holy God and crushes him under the contemplation of the impending doom. This is what the apostle means when he says, Rom. 3, 20.: “By the law is the knowledge of sin.”

It is in this way that the heart of man is made ready to receive the Gospel. When the hard heart has been bruised by the hammer of the Law, then the balm of Gilead, the Gospel, heals the wounds. When man has been brought to see that all his righteousnesses are nothing more than filthy rags he rejoices to receive the spotless robe of righteousness

which the Savior holds out to him. And in order that this result may be brought about the Law must be diligently applied as a mirror in our homes, in our churches, and in our schools. With a view to bringing about such an effect Christ held up this Law to the Pharisees and to the people around Him.

But unto the disciples, also, He spake, showing that even Christians have use for the Law as a mirror. For Christians should time and again view themselves in this perfect mirror of the Law, in order that they may ever be mindful of how in themselves they can do nothing that is perfect without blemish. Satan never leaves off tempting the best of God's children and strives to entangle them in the sin of selfrighteousness and to lull them into the sleep of security. But if the Christian will ever have the Law of the Lord before his eyes he will never forget what a lost and abandoned and wretched sinner he was before the grace of God found him and made him what he is; he will ever see that even now while he is a disciple of Christ, he must humbly acknowledge before his Father in heaven that in many things he does still err and is far from having reached that perfection for which he should strive. Thus will all thoughts of pride be kept down and he will cling more closely to his only Savior with a believing heart filled with gratitude for that righteousness which covers up all his shortcomings. Undismayed by repeated failures to do the perfect will of God he will strive again and anew with the power that grace provides. And in this striving the Law, which is the revealed will of his God, serves to direct him and is his rule of life.

### III.

True it is, no man can enter into the kingdom of heaven by virtue of his own righteousness. When the Savior says: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into



the kingdom of heaven," He in no wise intimates that it lies within the power of any man to acquire this necessary righteousness. All he says is, that they who do enter into the kingdom of heaven must have a righteousness transcending that of the scribes and Pharisees. As to how this is obtained He says not a word. But the way in which He describes this righteousness must lead every one to see that it is beyond the power of man to acquire it for himself. As Christians we know that all our hope is based upon the holiness of the Savior which has become ours by faith. The imputing of a righteousness foreign to man is what distinguishes our most holy Christian religion from all religions falsely so called. Christians appear before their God clad in the snow white garb of Christ's holiness. For them He fulfilled the Law, every jot and tittle of it.

This truth, however, cannot make the Christian sluggish in the new obedience. "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart" promises David speaking in the name of all believers. God has enlarged the heart of the Christian, that is, made it large, dilated it with joy by making known unto it the Gospel tidings of salvation; and the heart thus made glad is filled with gratitude and love towards God and is eager to run the way of His commandments, to do His will. As a loving and obedient child delights to do the will of a loving father so as to earn from him a smile of approval, so is the loving child of the kind Father in heaven filled with burning zeal to do His will. And just as the child can please its father best by hearkening unto his words and obeying them, so the Son of God can please His Father best by giving ear unto His Word and Law, to do the same. The Savior indicates in our text that Christians evince their love towards God; for He puts it down as a self-evident duty that they bring their gifts to the altar. Moreover, a lesson taught in the whole text is this, that Christians should show their love towards their neighbor in thought, word, and

deed. There are, then, ways in which the believer can do the will of his Father both towards his God and towards his neighbor. But he must not suppose that it has been left for him to decide as to how he can please God. It has not been left to him to serve God according to his whims and fancies. Many have thought themselves the judges and arbiters in this matter and have set up their own forms of good works. The one fondly imagines that he is doing the perfect will of God by taking the vows of obedience to the Church, of chastity, of poverty, while another makes much of abstaining from certain meats and drinks, not thinking for a moment that unto them apply the words of Christ, the Son of God: "In vain do they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Surely, it is the Lord who must say what is right and well-pleasing in His sight. Man may reason: "Bringing gifts to His altar is well-pleasing to the Lord, and, therefore, it matters little or nothing whether when I bring my offering my heart is reconciled to my brother." But the Savior, who knows the mind of God, shows that such bringing of gifts even to the altar of the Lord is an abomination in His eyes, and that such a course, far from meeting with the approval of Him for whom these offerings are ostensibly made, merits nothing but His wrath and condemnation.

Therefore, would Christians really do the will of God and feel assured that they are doing that which is acceptable in His sight, they must not trust to their own feelings and opinions, but must hold solely to the will of God as revealed in His Word and Law. Thus the Law becomes their rule of life according to which they strive to act and to live, conscious that in thus striving they are really endeavoring to render obedience to their kind Father in heaven to do His will. Of course, the more earnestly a Christian strives and the more carefully he keeps watch over every thought, word, and deed, in order to see whether all his thinking and speaking and doing conform to the Law of the

Lord, the more sensible will he become of the fact that even his best endeavors fall far short of the perfect will of God and the more will he find cause to take comfort in the perfect obedience to the Law rendered by Him who came to fulfil the same. In that soul there will ever be a grateful appreciation of the love and merit of that One who paid for him and for every sinner the uttermost farthing.

Guided by our text we have directed our attention to the threefold use of the Law, than which Scripture knows no other. The vanity of all those sectarians who imagine that by their very imperfect and partial observance of the Law God is rendered somewhat propitious or that thereby the work of salvation is in a measure accomplished, needs no further refutation. Rank insanity, in the light of our text, is the doctrine of perfect holiness; that is, the delusion that Christians may attain to such a degree of perfection in this life that they fulfil the Law completely.—To us this revealed will of God is a curb upon the godless world, a mirror in which to view our sins and imperfections, a rule of life according to which to direct our steps in order, as loving children, to do the will of our Father in heaven. May we be diligent in using this, God's Law, showing our love towards God, making known our love towards our fellows, shining as bright examples of Christian virtue, until from this life's frailty we shall be saints made perfect in heaven above. Amen. G. A. R.

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