

THE MORAL LAW SUMMARILY COMPREHENDED IN THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS.

MATTH. xix. 17.—*If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments.*

THIS is Christ's answer to a self-justiciary, who expected life by the works of the law. Christ, to convince him of his folly, sends him to the law, saying, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

There are only two things which I take notice of here for our purpose. 1. That by *the commandments* are understood the ten commandments, ver. 18. where several of them are specified. 2. That under these commandments he comprehends the whole moral law; for this resolution of the young man's question is founded on that, Gal. iii. 12. 'The man that doth them shall live in them;' compared with ver. 10. 'For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse.' The man had deceived himself in taking the commandments only according to the letter, and therefore thought he had kept them; but Christ finds him out new work in these commandments, which he had not thought of.

The doctrine I observe from the text is,

DOCT. 'The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.'

In discoursing from this subject, I shall shew,

I. How the commandments were given.

II. Why the law was thus given and renewed.

III. How the moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commands.

IV. Apply.

I. I shall shew how the moral law or ten commandments, were given. There are ten commandments, not more nor fewer, as appears from Deut. x. 4. where they are expressly called *ten*. And therefore the papists, who in some sort leave out the second, split the tenth into two, to make up the number. They were given to the Israelites after they came out of their Egyptian bondage; for they that cast off Satan's yoke, must take on the Lord's. They were given two ways.

1. By an audible voice from the Lord on mount Sinai, accompanied with great terror. Never was law given in such a solemn manner, with such dread and awful majesty, Exod. xix. Deut. iv. 5. Heb. xii. 18. The people were commanded to wash their clothes before the law was delivered to them. By this, as in a type, the Lord required the sanctifying of their ears and hearts to receive it.

There were bounds and limits set to the mount, that it might breed in the people dread and reverence to the law, and to God the holy and righteous Lawgiver. There were great thunderings and lightnings. The artillery of heaven was shot off at that solemnity, and therefore it is called 'a fiery law.' The angels attended at the delivery of this law. The heavenly militia, to speak so, were all mustered out on this important occasion. In a word, the law was promulgated with the marks of supreme majesty; God by all this shewing how vain a thing it is for sinners to expect life by the works of the law; and thereby also shewing the necessity of a Mediator.

2. The ten commandments were written on two tables of stone, and that by the finger of God himself. This writing them on stone might hold out the perpetuity of that law, and withal the hardness of men's hearts. There were two tables that were given to Moses, written immediately by God himself, *Exod. xxxi. ult.* These Moses brake, *chap. xxxii. 16, 19*; plainly holding out the entertainment they would get amongst men. Then other two tables were hewn by Moses, yet written by the finger of God, *chap. xxxiv. 1*; for by the law is the sinner hewed, but by the spirit of gospel-grace is the law written on the heart. These two tables were afterwards laid up in the ark of the covenant, in order to be fulfilled by Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. This writing of the law upon tables of stone is justly supposed to have been the first writing in the world; and therefore this noble and useful invention was of divine origin, and the foundation of all Moses's after writings, which have been so useful to the church in all ages.

II. I shall shew, why the law was thus given and renewed.

1. For the confirmation of the natural law. For though there was no need of such a confirmation of the law while man stood, yet such was the darkness of the mind, the rebellion of the will, and disorder of the affections and other faculties, that there remained only some relics of it, which that they might not also be lost, the ten commandments were given.

2. That the same might be corrected in those things wherein it was corrupted by the fall, or defective. And indeed there was great need of it in this respect. For the law of nature in man's corrupt state is very defective. For,

(1.) It cannot carry a man to the first cause of all his misery, even Adam's first sin, and discover the evils of lust and concupiscence that lurk in his heart. Mere natural light can never teach a man to feel the weight and curse of a sin committed some thou-

sands of years before he was born, or to mourn for that filthiness, which he contracted in his conception, and for those sproutings of sin in his nature. The apostle tells us, that this cannot be learned without the law, Rom. vii. 7. 'I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, thou shalt not covet.'

(2.) The law of nature is defective, because natural Judgment is thoroughly distorted and infatuated, so that it is ready to reckon evil good, and good evil, light darkness and darkness light. Nature is ready to dictate unto men, that they are 'rich and increased with goods, and stand in need of nothing; while in the mean time they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.'

(3.) It is defective, because it doth not drive men out of themselves for a remedy. The sublimest philosophy that ever was did never teach a man to deny himself, but always taught him to build up his house with the old ruins, and to fetch stores and materials out of the wonted quarry. Shame, humiliation, confusion of face, self-abhorrence, condemning ourselves, and flying to the righteousness of another, are virtues known only in the book of God, and which the learned philosophers would have esteemed both irrational and pusillanimous things.

(4.) It is defective, because by nature in particular men never knew nor had experience of a better state, and therefore must needs be ignorant of that full image of God in which it was created. As a man born and brought up in a dungeon is unable to conceive the state of a palace; or as the child of a nobleman stolen away, and brought up by some beggar, cannot conceive or suspect the honours of his blood; so corrupted nature is utterly unable, that has been born in a womb of ignorance, bred in a hell of uncleanness, and enthralled from the beginning to the prince of darkness, to conceive, or convince a man of, that most holy and pure condition in which he was created.

3. To supply what was wanting in it, being obliterated by sin. In the ages before Moses, the Lord's extraordinary appearances and revelations were more frequent, and the lives of men were much longer, than they were afterwards. In Moses's time they were reduced to seventy, or little more. These aged patriarchs transmitted the knowledge of the law and men's duty to their descendents; and by this means it was handed down from father to son; but by degrees men's lives were shortened, and following generations were involved in ignorance of God and his law. Therefore, to supply this defect, and to prevent the knowledge of it from utterly perishing, was the law promulgated at Sinai.

4. To evince and convince of the necessity of a Mediator, the people that saw not this defect. When the law was thus given anew, and men saw their utter incapacity to fulfil it, by giving that due obedience it required, they would come, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, to see the necessity of a Mediator for satisfying the law, both as to its command and penalty.

III. I shall shew how the law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments. To be summarily comprehended in a thing, is to be summed up in it, to be abridged and compendised as it were. The commandment is exceeding broad, and runs through the whole Bible; but we have a summary or short view of it in the ten commands given by the Lord on Mount Sinai. The ten commandments are the heads of all the duties of the law largely contained in the whole Bible. They are the text which Christ himself, the prophets, and apostles expounded. They comprehend the whole duty of man, Eccl. xii. 13. There is nothing that God requires but may be reduced to one of these commandments. So faith is a duty of the first command, as it obliges men to believe whatever God reveals. The first commandment concerns the object of worship, requiring us to know and acknowledge God to be the true God, and our God, and to worship and glorify him as such, in heart and life. The second relates to the means of worship, requiring us to receive, observe, and keep pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word. The third respects the holy and reverend use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, words, and works. The fourth requires us to sanctify the Sabbath, that day which he hath set apart for his own worship and service. The fifth relates to the duties we owe to one another in our several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals. The sixth requires the preservation of our own life and that of others. The seventh respects the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour. The eighth relates to the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others. The ninth requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, especially in witness-bearing. And the tenth requires us to be contented with our own condition, and to have a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour and all that is his. And every commandment forbids whatever is opposite to or inconsistent with what it requires.

As to the rules necessary to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments, the following things are to be noticed.

1. They respect not only the outward actions, but the inward motions of the heart. The law is spiritual, and so reaches the in-

ward as well as the outward man. It reaches the understanding, will, and affections, and all the other powers and faculties of the soul, as well as our words, works, and gestures. The law is spiritual, Rom. vii. 14. reaching the heart as well as the life; and therefore we ought to study conformity to it in both. The lawgiver is a spirit, and beholds all the motions and inclinations of the soul, as well as the actions of the body; and is grieved and offended with the impurities of the heart, as well as with the enormities of the life; and therefore he requires an internal obedience, as well as an outward conformity to his will. The law extends to the imagination, that most roving and unstable faculty in man, and to dreams that are bred there.

But some may say, What is to be thought of men's dreaming that they are breaking God's commandments, e. g. profaning the Sabbath-day, swearing, lying, &c. while really they are fast asleep, are not doing so, nor opening their mouths, &c. ?

Ans. No doubt it is sin, and will damn thee if it be not pardoned, and washed away by the blood of Christ: For, (1.) The scripture condemns it. Hence the apostle, Jude, 8. speaks of 'filthy dreams that defile the flesh.' (2.) The consent of the heart unto sin, the delectation that it finds in it, makes a man guilty; and the soul is always a rational agent, and this consent is given to these temptations in sleep. (3.) A man when awake thinking what he doth is sinful, though upon the matter it be not, yet it is sin to him; e. g. a man taking his own goods, which yet he thinks are another man's, is guilty of theft before God: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. So is it in this case. (4.) As these things arise from corrupt nature, so readily they follow on some such motions that people have been taken up with them awake, or from a loose, carnal, and secure frame. They are looked on as sinful by tender consciences. (5.) As men may do something pleasing to God in a dream, so may they do something to displease him, 2 Kings iii. 5. (6.) The law impressed upon the heart is designed to keep it even in sleep, Prov. vi. 22, 23. 'When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light.' But ye may say, What if a man has been watching against these things, praying against them, &c. and yet in sleep falls into them? I answer, It is still sinful, in so far as the heart complies with the diabolical suggestion; and the truth is, by grace temptation is sometimes resisted in sleep, as well as when we are awake.

2. The commandments require perfection. No partial obedience can be admitted or sustained. The least defect is fatal, and exposes to the curse. This ought to be seriously considered, that we may

see our need of Christ's blood and righteousness, to cover and atone for our obedience, and all its defects.

3. Whatever sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded; and where any duty is commanded, the contrary vice is forbidden. For instance, when God forbids us to have any other gods before him, he at the same time commands us to worship and adore him, the only living and true God. When he forbids the profanation of his name, he requires that esteem and reverence should be given to it.—When he forbids to steal, he commands the preservation of our neighbour's goods, by all the means that are lawful and proper for us to use. When he forbids us to kill, he commands love to our neighbour, and the preservation of his life by all lawful means. On the other hand, when God requires us to remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy, he forbids the forgetting and profanation of it. When he commands us to honour our parents, he forbids us to be undutiful or injurious to them. And indeed the nature of the thing itself requires this: for the duties enjoined by the law cannot be performed without shunning the vices which it forbids; and the sins forbidden by the law cannot be avoided, unless the contrary virtues enjoined by it are performed.—This shews the insufficiency of negative holiness; for we must not only do what the law forbids, but perform what it requires; otherwise no obedience is given to it at all.

4. Under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden and commanded: For instance, when the Lord forbids us to kill, he forbids us also to beat and wound our neighbour; and all envy, malice, and revenge, are forbidden at the same time. When he forbids to commit adultery, he forbids also incest, fornication, and all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections. When he forbids to steal, he forbids rapine, robbery, and all deceitful dealing by false weights and unjust measures. On the other hand, when the Lord commands to have no other god but himself, he commands us to love him, to reverence, worship, and adore him. When he commands us to remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy, he commands us to make conscience of the duties of his worship and service. When he commands us to love our neighbour, he commands us to do all the good offices unto him which are in our power to perform. And when any sin is forbidden, all means and things leading thereto are forbidden. And so gross actions are named, not to pass over lesser ones, but to make them more abominable, while we see how God looks on them, giving them such gross names.

5. The prohibition of the effect includes also the prohibition of the cause, from which the effect flows. For instance, when the Lord

forbids the profanation of the Sabbath, he forbids also all those works by which the Sabbath may be profaned. When he forbids uncleanness, he forbids intemperance, drunkenness, gluttony, and whatever may incite thereunto. When he forbids us to kill, he forbids anger and wrath, malice and revenge, from which bloodshed does oft-times proceed. On the other hand, when the law requires chastity, it enjoins also temperance and sobriety, and diligence in those particular callings wherein God has placed men in the world, their being means and helps thereunto, and the source as it were from whence they proceed.

6. The precepts of the second table of the law must yield to those of the first, when they cannot be both performed together. For instance our love to our neighbour must be subjected to our love to God; yea, we are commanded to hate father and mother for Christ, Luke xiv. 26. When our love to our parents and relations comes in competition with our love to Christ, and is inconsistent with it, then we are not bound unto it: and when the commands of men run cross to the commands of God, then God is to be obeyed rather than men, as the apostles shew, Acts iv. 19.

7. Whatever God forbids in his law is at no time lawful to be done; and whatever he commands is always our duty. Therefore it is said, Deut. iv. 9. 'Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life.' Yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times: for there are many duties enjoined us which suppose certain conditions; and if these be wanting, there is no place for the performance of the duties. For instance, we are commanded to honour our parents; but this supposeth they are alive or present with us, or else there can be no place for that duty. But whatever vices are forbidden in God's law, they are at no time lawful to be done. The negative precepts bind us always, and at all times. We are continually to shun and avoid every thing that is evil.

8. Whatever is forbidden or commanded with respect to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places and stations, to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places. Hence it is said, Exod. xx. 10. 'The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, &c.

I shall conclude with a few practical inferences from this subject.

Inf. 1. This doctrine lets us see that the rule of man's obedience is not wrapt up in darkness and shades, is not ambiguous, or hard

to be understood. The rule is not far-fetched, and to be found out by hard study and laborious inquiry. No ; it is plain and obvious to the common sense and reason of mankind. It is contained in ten plain words, and explained and illustrated in every book of the Bible. Nay, it is in some measure written on the hearts of all men ; every son and daughter of Adam has some remains of it written on their hearts, which all the boisterous and dashing waves of corruption have never been able to efface. We may say of it, as the apostle does of the gospel, The rule of thy obedience, O man, 'is nigh thee, even in thy heart and in thy mouth.' So that it is in vain to pretend ignorance of this rule. All pretences of ignorance in this matter are mere affectation, and most unaccountable.

2. What matter of regret is it, that in a land of light, where the Bible is, which contains in it this rule of obedience, and enforces it with the strongest motives, people should be so ignorant of what is so much their interest and advantage to know ! They are wofully ignorant of both the law of God, and the spirituality and extent thereof ; and pay no manner of respect to it in their heart or practice.

3. The law is perfect, and requires a full conformity thereto. It requires the utmost perfection in every duty, and forbids the least degree of every sin. So that life and salvation are absolutely unattainable by it, since no man can perform such an obedience to it as it requires. Our salvation is suspended in obedience to the law ; which since we cannot perform, let us be induced to betake ourselves to the obedience and satisfaction of Christ, by which the law is magnified and made honourable, and with which God is well pleased ; and will be pleased with every sinner that takes the benefit thereof.

4. The commandment is exceeding broad, reaching to every motion, desire, and affection of the heart, as well as to every action we perform. It is a rule both for our hearts and our lives. Let us then study to know this holy law of God in its spirituality and extent, and yield that obedience to it which it requires ; sincere, flowing from right principles in the heart, and directed to right ends ; universal, in respect of parts, without mincing ; cheerful, in respect of the manner ; and constant and perpetual, as to the duration. And the Lord give us understanding in all things, to know and do our duty, to the glory of his name.