**“Nature of the Law” The Signs of the Times, 17, 31.**

E. J. Waggoner

Having found that the law must be in force wherever the gospel is preached, it is very proper that we learn something in regard to its nature. What we have already learned would teach us that it is just the opposite of sin, for “sin is the transgression of the law.” But we will see what the Bible has to say further on this subject. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.9}

We first quote the words of the Psalmist, in Psalm 19:7, 8, 10, 11:— {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.10}

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.” {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.11}

This comprises all that may be said of the law; for nothing can be more than perfect. Nothing can be added to that which is perfect, neither can anything be taken away without leaving it imperfect. Therefore the testimony of David teaches us that when God spoke his law it was in just the form that he wanted it, and that he never designed that any change should be made in it. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.12}

In perfect accord with the above testimony, the apostle Paul says: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” Romans 7:12. This being so, we would naturally expect that the keeping of the commandments would make the keeper thereof perfect and holy. This we find is the case. Moses said to the Israelites:— {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.13}

“And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.” Deuteronomy 6:25. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.14}

Observe how perfectly this agrees with what we find in the New Testament: Moses said that to keep the law is righteousness. Of course the opposite of righteousness is *un*righteousness, and John tells us that “all unrighteousness is sin.” 1 John 5:17. Then we must conclude that sin is just the opposite of obedience to the law; and that brings us to the original definition: “Sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:4. Unrighteousness means any deviation from that which is right; and since all unrighteousness is sin, we know that the slightest deviation from right is a transgression of the law. To show that this reasoning has solid scriptural foundation, we quote Psalm 119:96:— {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.15}

“I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.” And to show how broad and far-reaching it is, we have only to read Hebrews 4:12:— {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.16}

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.17}

Thus we learn that the law is so broad that it takes cognizance of the very thoughts of the heart, and not alone the outward acts. As illustrating this, we have our Saviour’s words in the sermon on the mount:— {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.18}

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Matthew 5:27, 28. See also verses 21, 22. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.19}

Other instances might be given; but this is sufficient to show the breadth of the commandments of God. The sixth commandment may be broken by a single angry thought that may never be expressed; and the seventh may be as effectually broken by a single wrong desire as by the overt act. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.20}

Surely the law of God is broad; and since in all its prohibitions and requirements it is perfect, we can readily and naturally accept the words of the wise man, in Ecclesiastes 12:13:— {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.21}

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is *the whole duty of man*.” {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.22}

This statement, we repeat, is a natural consequence of what has preceded; for the keeping of a perfect law will make a man perfect, and nothing more than perfection can be required. There is no sin conceivable that is not forbidden by the ten commandments, and no righteous act or thought that is not commended and enjoined by them. Of course it would be impossible to go through the whole list of possible thoughts and deeds, in order to demonstrate this; but it will be found true in every case. Things may be mentioned which at first sight may seem to many persons to be outside of the ten commandments; but a little careful thought will show that nothing can be done that is beyond or outside of the perfect law of God. We have not the slightest fear of being brought to confusion because of this statement. We repeat, Nothing more than the duties enjoined in the ten commandments can be required of any man. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.23}

In this connection it will be well to notice Matthew 5:20, which some may think opposed to the statement last made, but which strongly supports it. We quote: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” This text would be opposed to the statement made in the preceding paragraph if it could be shown that the scribes and Pharisees kept the law perfectly, but not otherwise. Indeed, this verse could not teach that it is a man’s duty to do more than the ten commandments, without contradicting the nineteenth verse, which says that “whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” It must be, then, that the scribes and Pharisees, while professing to keep the commandments, did not do all that the law requires. This we shall find was the case, if we read Matthew 23:25-28:— {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.24}

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.25}

The scribes and Pharisees pretended to keep the law, and so far as their outward acts were concerned, they did keep it; but Christ, who “knew what was in man,” saw that in their hearts they despised the law, and that they grievously transgressed it, but yet in such a way that men could not know their wickedness. Such obedience, Christ taught will not suffice to gain an entrance into heaven. Unless your obedience to the law is more thorough than that, you can in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.26}

Here we see the difference between obedience only to the letter and obedience to the spirit of the law. The law is spiritual, and therefore the spirit of it must be obeyed; but some people think on this ground to excuse themselves for disobeying the law. Say they: “The Lord reproved the scribes and Pharisees for their obedience to the letter of the law, therefore we should not think ourselves bound by the letter; if we keep the spirit, that is sufficient.” But mark, The Saviour did not say that our righteousness must be entirely different from that of the scribes and Pharisees, but that it must *exceed* it. To *exceed* means “to pass or go beyond;” and by using that word the Saviour showed that we must keep the law as well as the scribes and Pharisees did, and a great deal better. Not only must the law be kept outwardly, but it must be obeyed from the heart. He did not reprove the Pharisees for refraining from open adultery, but he reproved them for the lust with which their hearts were filled, and which nothing but their love for the applause of men kept them from manifesting openly. Christ did not reprove them because they refrained from actual murder, but because they cherished envy, hatred, and enmity, thus as effectually breaking the sixth commandment as though they had actually taken human life. E. J. W. {SITI August 3, 1891, p. 235.27}

(*To be continued.*)

**“Nature of the Law. (Concluded.)” The Signs of the Times, 17, 32.**

E. J. Waggoner

A moment’s thought will show anyone the folly of supposing that the law may be kept in spirit and not in letter. Can a man worship gods of gold, or stone, or brass, and yet have a proper regard for the God that made heaven and earth? Can a man blaspheme the name of God, and at the same time have perfect love and reverence in his heart? Is it possible to wantonly violate the letter of the sixth commandment, by taking human life, and yet have no trace of enmity, but only perfect love in the heart? Will a man deliberately and persistently take the goods of others, if he has no covetous desires in his heart? And does not everybody know that the committing of adultery is only the outward manifestation of the lust that burns within? There can be but one answer to these questions. Even so there can be no spiritual obedience without obedience to the letter as well. {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.28}

The statement of the wise man, that to keep the commandments is the whole duty of man, and of Christ, that whosoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven, prepares us for the truth stated by the apostle in Romans 2:13:— {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.29}

“For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.30}

Since to keep the commandments of God is the whole duty of man, or course the one who keeps the law will be justified; a man can never be justly condemned when he does his whole duty. We will not, at this time, inquire just how comprehensive the term “the doers of the law” is, nor whether or not there are any such. For the present we shall be content with the truth, which allows of no exception, namely, that “the *doers* of the law shall be justified.” {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.31}

In Romans 6:23 we read that “the wages of sin is death.” But if a man never sins, he will never receive the wages therefor, and consequently the doer of the law will live. And this, again, is no more than we find plainly stated in Romans 10:5: “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” The man whom the law justifies-the one who is really a *doer* of all its requirements-will certainly life. Now it is a self-evident fact that when God made a perfect, holy, and just law, he designed that all his subjects should obey it. And since the law, when it is kept, gives life, we can see the force of the apostle’s statement, that the law “was ordained to life.” Romans 7:10. As we shall hereafter see more fully, the law was given that man might ever keep in harmony with God’s will, in which condition he must necessarily have life. {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.32}

There is just one more point which we wish to bring out concerning the nature of the law. Let the reader mark it closely; for in the future consideration of this subject it will often be referred to, as it really covers the whole ground; upon it everything else depends. David says (Psalm 119:172): “My tongue shall speak of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness.” This is really nothing more than is brought out in Psalm 19:7, and other texts; but it leads to another text which materially widens the range of our view of the law of God. In Isaiah 51:6 we read:— {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.33}

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.” {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.34}

Abolish the righteousness of God? Of course not; but what is the righteousness of God? The very next verse tells us of what the Lord, through his prophet, is here speaking. We proceed: “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law.” The conclusion to be drawn is very evident. The people who know righteousness are they in whose hearts God’s law is enshrined; they know righteousness, because the law is itself righteousness (Psalm 119:172); and not only is it righteousness in the abstract, but it is *the righteousness of God*. This is an expression which the apostle Paul often uses in referring to the law. {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.35}

What an exalted idea of the law of God does this give us! To say that it is perfect may convey various ideas to different persons, for many would be apt to measure the law by their own standard of perfection; but when we learn that it is “the righteousness of God,” we know that it must be infinite in its breadth. The law is a transcript of God’s character, a photograph of character which is infinite in its perfection. It is his nature represented in words, for the benefit of his creatures, so that they may know what is required of them if they would be partakers of the divine nature. God says to man, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:16. But without some description of the holiness of God, it would be impossible for man to know how he should order his life; for “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Jeremiah 10:23. {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.36}

Since the law is “the righteousness of God”—a brief yet comprehensive description of his character—it may properly be termed the way of the Lord. And so in Isaiah 55:8, 9 we have an additional evidence of the exceeding greatness of that law: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” The holiness of God’s law is just as much superior to any goodness that man possesses as God is greater than man. The law of God, then, is very justly called his *way*, and since those who become acquainted with God by walking in the way with him are at peace (Job 22:21), it follows that a proper term for the law is, “the way of peace.” It is the ten commandments, then, to which Paul refers, when, speaking of the universal wickedness of mankind, he says: “Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the *way of peace* have they not know; there is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:16-18. This idea is still further proved by Isaiah 48:18: “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.” {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.37}

The law of God is also called *the truth*. “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.” Psalm 119:142. It is the very perfection of truth, since it is the expression of God’s character. This point is brought out in Romans 2:17-20. Paul here says:— {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.38}

“Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.” {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.39}

In that justly-celebrated work, “The Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul,” by Conybeare and Howson, the last clause of the above text is thus rendered: “Possessing in the law the perfect pattern of knowledge and of truth.” This accurately describes the law, which is such a perfect pattern of truth that whosoever follows it will live a life of perfect truth. It is because it is perfect that it enables the one who is instructed in it to “try the things which differ” (see margin of verse 18), or, as Conybeare and howson render it, to “give judgment upon good or evil.” {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.40}

It is impossible for mortal tongue ever to express, or even for mortal intellect ever to comprehend, the breadth, the beauty, and the perfection of God’s law. There is in it abundant food for meditation both day and night; and the more we learn of it, the more we can appreciate the Psalmist’s glowing descriptions of it, and his exhortations to continually study it. But as man, by searching, can never find out God so that he can fully comprehend all his attributes, so no man, even when glorified and made immortal, can ever exhaust the law of God. On earth, as we meditate in the law, we can only exclaim, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” and in heaven, even to the countless ages of eternity, as in the glory of his presence we are permitted to look with unveiled eyes upon Him whose character is portrayed in the ten commandments, our wonder will not cease, and we can only join with the angelic beings that support his throne, in saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!” E. J. W. {SITI August 10, 1891, p. 235.41}

**“Jurisdiction of the Law” The Signs of the Times, 17, 33.**

E. J. Waggoner

We have already anticipated this division of the subject, and have shown, by the extent of the gospel commission, that the law of God has been known and transgressed by men in every part of the world; that, as the gospel is to be preached in all the world until the coming of Christ, sin will exist just as extensively, and just as long; and that, consequently, the law, of which sin is the transgression, will be binding in all the world till the end of time. We wish, however, to carry the subject a little further. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.42}

The apostle says that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” and that he has committed the carrying on of this work to his ambassadors-the ministers of the gospel-who, in Christ’s stead, pray the world to be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20. Now, reconciliation implies a previous condition of enmity; and, if the world needed reconciling to God, it was because the world was at enmity with him. And since the work of reconciling is still being carried on, it follows that the rebellion, or enmity, still exists. Then the question arises, In what does that enmity consist? The same apostle tells us: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; *for it is not subject to the law* of God, neither indeed can be.” Romans 8:7. Men are rebels, because they are in opposition to God’s law. And this is the same truth that had been uttered, centuries before, by the inspired prophet: “Now to, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever; that this is a *rebellious people*, lying children, children *that will not hear the law of the Lord*.” Isaiah 30:8, 9. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.43}

This brings out again the fact previously stated, that the gospel announces, and carries on its forefront, the law. It was the transgression of the law that made it necessary for Christ to come to reconcile men to God. And as men by continued sin, lost their sense of its heinousness, and of their obligation to God, it became more and more necessary that the gospel, in announcing to men the way of pardon and reconciliation, should make known their need of such reconciliation and pardon by setting forth, in plain terms, the law which they had transgressed. This is what is plainly stated by Peter, when, after quoting Isaiah’s tribute to the enduring nature of the law, “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever,” he adds, “and *this* is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” 1 Peter 1:24, 25. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.44}

The quotations made from John Wesley and Bishop Simpson are in harmony with this conclusion. Indeed, the conclusion is so nearly self-evident that it must be reached by all thoughtful, candid minds. The very fact that a pardon is granted, attest the authority of the law; and before a pardon can be granted, the individual must know and acknowledge his guilt. If a man thinks himself righteous, he will indignantly spurn any offer of pardon, even though he may really stand in need of it. Human nature would leave such to the fate which their own blindness and stubbornness deserve; but God loves the world, and desires that all men shall accept his pardon, and thus be reconciled to him; and therefore he takes pains to bring men to a sense of their sinful condition, so that the pardon which he offers ma be accepted. The same messenger who is commission to announce the pardon, proclaims the law of God, which awakens the self-confident sinner, so that he may appreciate his lost condition. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.45}

Let me look still further into the matter of the extent of the law’s jurisdiction. Read Romans 3:19: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” The law speaks only to those who are within the bounds of its jurisdiction; it cannot condemn any who may walk contrary to its provisions, if they are outside of its limits. For example, a man in Russia may commit an act which is forbidden by the laws of the United States; yet he cannot on that account be declared guilty, simply because the United States law has no jurisdiction in his case. He is not amenable to it. But, as a consequence of what the law of God says, all the world are found guilty before him. This, again, shows conclusively that all the world are in duty bound to keep God’s law. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.46}

There are no exceptions to this fact. We have before learned that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), and that “where no law is, there is no transgression” (Romans 4:15); and therefore we know that wherever we find sin, there must also be the law. To whomsoever sin is imputed, upon him the law has claims; for “sin is not imputed when there is no law.” Romans 5:13. Now we find these statements in the third of Romans: “What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one;” “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Verse 9, 10, 23. Here the apostle descends to particulars, and shows that not to the Jews alone, but to Gentiles as well, is sin imputed, thus proving beyond all controversy that the Gentiles as well as the Jews are under the jurisdiction of the law of God, and have violated it. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.47}

Our investigation of the law began with the time when it was given on Mount Sinai; and we must therefore now examine to see if that was the first of its existence. And here, as in all our study of the law, we find help from our knowledge of the fact that the law is “the righteousness of God.” Then it must necessarily have been in existence before the exode. Since it is a transcript of God’s character, it necessarily follows that its existence is coeval with the existence of God. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.48}

“But,” it may be objected, “the law, as a manifestation of God’s righteousness, might exist without being transcribed for the government of mankind.” So it might, if there were no creatures to whom it could be made known, or if there was any time after creatures had been brought into existence when God did not exercise government over them. But it is not for us to speculate on the state of affairs when God dwelt alone, inhabiting his own eternity, before the existence even of the “sons of God” that shouted for joy at the creation of this earth; and there certainly has never been a time since intelligent creatures were formed, either in heaven or on earth, when God was not supreme ruler. No created beings have ever been independent of his control. But if God has always been ruler, he must have had some rule of government, and that could be nothing else than his righteousness-his law. The ten commandments are righteousness; they are perfect, holy, just, and good, and therefore fitted to be the rule of a righteous and just government. Then, from the very nature of the law, we would conclude that it was binding on men before it was spoken from Mount Sinai. We shall shortly recur to the argument broached in this paragraph, but first we wish to show from positive evidence that the law of ten commandments is known by men, and was binding on them, before the giving of it on Sinai. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 235.49}

In Romans 5:12 we read that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Here the apostle shows that death is a consequence of sin; death came into the world because there was sin in the world. If there had been no sin, there would have been no death, and wherever death is found, it is positive evidence that sin exists. With this passage we may well place 1 Corinthians 15:56: “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” Here death is represented as a cruel monster that has brought many people into its power. It has poisonous fangs with which it strikes its victims, and these fangs, this sting, is sin. Let the fangs be drawn,—let sin be obliterated,—and death’s power would be gone. But “the strength of sin is the law.” “Sin is the transgression of the law,” and it is the violated law which provides death with its powerful sting. Were it not for the law, death would have no sting, that is, it would be powerless to destroy. So here, again, we have proof that wherever death is, there is the law also. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.1}

We read on: “For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” Romans 5:13, 14. Here we have the statement that until the law, that is, until the time of Moses, when it was spoken from Sinai, sin and death were in the world: therefore, we know that the law was in the world. And hereby we know that the expression, “until the law,” does not indicate that the time so specified was the first existence of the law; for both sin and death were in the world before that time, and neither can exist without the law, and the law violated. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.2}

Let us go still further into particulars. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), and “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Romans 5:13). But sin was imputed to Cain (Genesis 4:7, 8), and consequently the law was there to condemn. Turn to the commandments, and you will find that the sixth commandment was the one especially transgressed. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.3}

Again we read that “the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” Genesis 13:13. “Sin is not imputed when there is no law,” and consequently we know that God judged the Sodomites by his law. If he judged them by his law, of course they knew of the existence of that law; otherwise their punishment would have been just; but we may be sure that the “Judge of all the earth” will do right. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.4}

Take the case of the sons of Noah (Genesis 9:22-26). Here we have direct evidence that the fifth commandment was known; that it was violated by Ham, the young son of Noah, and kept by the other two; and that the one was cursed for his sin, while the others were blessed for their observance of the commandment. These things show the existence of that commandment, a knowledge of its existence, and also a knowledge that it was in full force to condemn the guilty and to acquit the innocent. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.5}

We find also the violation of the eighth commandment mentioned in Genesis 31:30. It is not necessary to particularize concerning each of the commandments, but we will notice one more. In Genesis 15:15, 16, we read these words of the Lord to Abraham: “And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they [his seed] shall come hither again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.” This shows that in the days of Abraham the inhabitants of Canaan, the Gentiles, were guilty of iniquity. Iniquity is sin, and “sin is the transgression of the law;” so, therefore, the Amorites had the law of God. Turn now to 1 Kings 21:25, 26, and you will learn of what the Amorites were guilty:— {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.6}

“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.” {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.7}

Here we find that the Amorites were cast out of Canaan because of idolatry,—idolatry, which, in its rites, involved the violation of not only the first and second commandments, but of all the ten. So we find that all the commandments were known and violated hundreds of years before the Jews came to Mount Sinai, and before there ever was a Jew. The point has not been proved, both from the nature of the law, and by actual illustration of the fact. E. J. W. {SITI August 17, 1891, p. 259.8}

**(*To be continued.*)**

**“Jurisdiction of the Law. (Continued.)” The Signs of the Times, 17, 34.**

E. J. Waggoner

Thus far we have shown the existence of the law of God from the earliest history of mankind. We wish now to carry the argument a step further, as we have already intimated that we should do. We have found the law to be “the righteousness of God,” the rule of his government. Since God has always been supreme ruler, and his rule has always been just and righteous, he must have judged only by his own righteous character, which is embodied in the decalogue. Now God has created many worlds besides this one (Hebrews 1:2), and since he formed ours that it might be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18), the conclusion is legitimate, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that he made the others for the same purpose. No thinking person can suppose that this little earth, one of the smallest among the innumerable planets of the universe, is the only one that is inhabited. Now of all these vast worlds, God is the King. “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.” Psalm 103:19. And since he can rule by naught except justice and righteousness, and all righteousness, even the righteousness of God himself, is comprised within the ten commandments, it follows that they, and they alone, form the rule of action in all God’s universe. Of the correctness of this conclusion we have direct evidence in Psalm 103:20, where we read that the angels “do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.” If the commandments are the rule in heaven, where God himself resides, certainly they are the rule “in all places of his dominion.” {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.9}

This view of the law, and we are confident that it is a just view, lifts the law question far, far above the plane on which its opposers would fain confine it. Instead of being imperfect and not calculated to bring man into proper relation to his Maker, it is the righteousness of God; instead of being confined to a small portion of this earth, the bounds of its jurisdiction are as extensive as the universe; instead of being given to one nation of earth, and to that alone, it is that to which all loyal creatures, even the angels of heaven, bow in humble allegiance; and instead of being limited to a few centuries of existence, it “stands fast forever and ever,” even as long as God exists and his kingdom ruleth over all. {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.10}

We are aware that at first sight many will think that this is going too far, and will possibly raise objections, and say that when we consider the nature of certain commandments, it is not reasonable to suppose that they could be in heaven for the restraint of heavenly beings. We will therefore add one or two more points. But first we would remark that when a case is supported by positive evidence, we are not at liberty to reject it because there are points about it which we do not understand. Nothing can be proved so clearly that no one can raise an *objection*, or even frame an argument, against it; and many things that are susceptible of the clearest proof, cannot be fully comprehended even by those who present the proof. Take, for instance, the question of the existence of God. Both nature and revelation plainly teach that there is a God, who has existed from eternity; yet it is impossible to state the case so clearly that no one can cavil or raise objections; and there is no one, no matter how clearly he can demonstrate that there is a God, who can comprehend him, or understand how he could exist from eternity. The argument from ignorance is no argument at all. Truth is truth, however great our ignorance of it may be. The merchant sitting in his office can put a question to his agent a thousand miles distant, and receive a reply the next minute. Tell this well-know fact to a savage, and he will not believe you; he cannot comprehend how such a thing can be done, and will present objections and arguments which, to his mind, show the utter impossibility of such a thing. Yet in spite of his ignorance, the thing is true. So there are many things in connection with God and his government which finite wisdom cannot explain, but which we must accept. {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.11}

Now to further show the reasonableness, nay, the absolute necessity, of the ten commandments existing as a rule for all the creatures of the universe: {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.12}

1. “The law of the Lord is perfect.” Psalm 19:7. Since it is perfect, nothing can be added to it or taken from it without making it imperfect. If, then, any creatures should be governed by more or less than this law, they would be governed by an imperfect law. But that, of course, would result in imperfect characters, and would further show the Lawgiver, to be imperfect; therefore such an idea cannot be entertained. {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.13}

2. “The law of the Lord is perfect,” because it is a transcript of his will,—his righteousness. Therefore all intelligent creatures must be governed by it. {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.14}

This has already been stated, but it will bear repetition. Too much stress cannot be laid upon it. Wherever God rules, his will must of necessity be law. That the ten-commandment law, the law out of which the Jews were instructed, is the will of God, Paul shows in Romans 2:17, 18: “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and *knowest his will*, and approvest the things that are more excellent [margin, “triest the things that differ”], *being instruction out of the law*.” That the ten commandments here referred to, may be seen from verses 21-23. Paul, therefore, speaking to a Jew, said, You know the will of God, because you are instructed out of the law. No further evidence is needed to show that the ten commandments are the will of God. Now, since all intelligent creatures must be governed by the will of God, it is evident that they are governed by the ten commandments, unless it could be shown that God changes, having one will at one time and toward one people, and another will at another time and for another people. But this cannot be; for “with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James 1:17. There is, then, one law for all. {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.15}

3. There are none who can have a greater interest than the righteous, whether of the redeemed or of those who never sinned, in having the ten commandments maintained as the standard of right. And this for the very reason that it is the standard of right. It is the badge of their loyalty. If there were a place where the ten commandments were not held as the law, the righteous ones would not want to go there; for there would be nothing to show that they were righteous. But enough has been said to prove beyond a reasonable doubt the universality of God’s holy law. In all places of God’s dominion, rational beings are by this law either justified or condemned. E. J. W. {SITI August 24, 1891, p. 259.16}

**(*To be continued.*)**

**“Jurisdiction of the Law. (Continued.)” The Signs of the Times, 17, 35.**

E. J. Waggoner

While we have been making the claim and proving it, that the law of God covers every possible act or thought, and that no responsible being is outside of its jurisdiction, someone has been looking for the verse which says that the Gentiles do not have the law, but are a law unto themselves. Perhaps this is as good a time as any to consider that text. An answer to it will also involve the consideration of the question why the ten commandments, since they have such universal jurisdiction, were spoken from Mount Sinai only to the Jews. Let us now read the passage above referred to:— {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.17}

“For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another).” Romans 2:12-15. {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.18}

A brief examination of Paul’s argument in this chapter will be necessary in order to get a proper understanding of this text. It will be noticed that the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth verses are parenthetical, and are therefore secondary to the main argument. Therefore, in stating the argument, we shall omit those three verses. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul has shown the terribly immoral condition of the heathen world; and in the second chapter he proceeds to show that whoever condemns the heathen, condemns himself, for all are guilty. God, he says, “will render *to every man* according to his deeds.” To those who patiently persevere in well doing, he will render eternal life; but to those who are contentious, and do not obey the truth (see Psalm 119:142), he will render indignation and wrath. And these rewards of good or ill will be rendered to very man, whether he be Jew or Gentile. “For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.19}

In the first two chapters of Romans, the apostle brings out the fact, which is plainly stated in the third, that “both Jews and Gentiles” are “under sin,” and that “there is none righteous, no, not one.” In the passage under consideration, he states that, as a consequence, all who do not repent shall suffer “the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds.” This will be done without regard to nationality; “for there is no respect of persons with God;” that is, it is not a man’s birth, but his character, that gives him favor with God. It is the *doers of the law* whom he justifies, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, and not those who, as did many of the Jews, hear the law, but do not obey. All who sin, whether with the law or without it, shall perish. {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.20}

In the twelfth and fourteenth verses we have the two classes brought to view-those who have the law, and those who have it not. There is no question but that the Jews had the law; they rested in it (Romans 2:17), and by breaking it dishonored God (verses 23, 24). And the fourteenth verse tells us plainly that those not having the law are the Gentiles. Before considering their case, we must not fail to note the fact that both the Jews who had the law, and the Gentiles who had it not, had sinned. They were alike guilty before God. Romans 3:9, 10. Now “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), and “where no law is, there is not transgression” (Romans 4:15). Therefore it is beyond controversy that both classes here mentioned had transgressed law, and more than that, had been conscious of the fact, for “sin is not imputed when there is no law.” So it is certain that the Gentiles had transgressed the law and that they “sinned without law.” How shall we explain this seeming contradiction? Let us see. Read again verses 14, 16:— {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.21}

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.22}

When God made man in his own image, he made him upright. Ecclesiastes 7:29. Not alone in his physical form, but also in his moral nature, he was in the image of God. While Adam continued in this upright, sinless condition, the law of God was in his heart. We know this from Psalm 40:8, where David, speaking for the Messiah, says, “I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.” The existence of the law of God in the heart is manifested by the willingness to obey that law; and he who, as was the case with Christ, has the law perfectly formed within his heart, will render perfect obedience to the law. This was the case with our first parents in the garden of Eden. {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.23}

But man fell from his high estate; he sinned against God, and thus marred the perfect copy of the law which had existed in his heart. The tendency of sin is to multiply itself; like the tares sown among the good grain, it will grow without any attention. So the first sin prepared the way for many more, till at last nearly all the world became wholly given up to sin. In Hebrews 3:13 the apostle says that men become “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;” that is, the more men sin, the less heinous does sin appear to them, until at last evil appears to be only good, and good evil, and they sin without the slightest compunction of conscience. This principle is something with which everybody is familiar. Now this progressive love of sin, and the indifference to it, is nothing else than the obliterating of the copy of the law which exists in a more or less perfect state in every heart. This work is not done instantaneously; it takes time for men to so completely obliterate the law from their hearts that they will feel no restraint. But when it is entirely gone, then man is in the condition in which he was just prior to the flood, when “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Genesis 6:5. So long, however, as any portion remains in his heart, the Spirit is enabled to strive with man, and, by means of that law, to convict of sin; and this whether the individual knows anything of the written revelation or not. {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.24}

Now the Gentiles did not have the law written on stone and in books, as did the Jews; they only had that portion which still remained unobliterated from their hearts. Of course the Jews, having much more light than the Gentiles had, were far more responsible. The former would necessarily be judged by the fullness of the law, for they could not plead ignorance of any portion of it. If they sinned, justice required that the condemnation of the law should be visited upon them in full measure. But the Gentiles could be judged only by the light that they had. Since they had not the written revelation, that, of course, would not be brought up against them. They knew, however, the difference, in many things, between right and wrong; and by this they are judged. Had they lived fully up to the light which they had by nature, they would have been counted as doers of the law; but since they did not, since their own consciences condemned them, they must suffer the consequences. The Jews, having the written law, are judged by the law; and the Gentiles, not having the written law, perish without being brought into judgment by it. {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.25}

Perhaps this can be made plainer by illustration. The Jews had every one of the ten commandments in such shape that they could constantly be reminded of them, and know the extent of their claims. Now when they come into judgment, it is no more than justice that the whole law should be held up before them, that the enormity of their guilt may be manifest. But here is a poor, ignorant barbarian, who, we will suppose, knew, by the light of nature, only two precepts of the law,—that it is wrong to kill and to commit adultery. His knowledge of the sinfulness of these acts is shown by his trying to conceal the fact when he has done one or the other of them. His own conscience accuses him. Now it is not necessary, in order to convict him of sin, that the whole ten commandments be held up beside the record of his life. In the judgment let the two precepts with which he was familiar be recalled to his mind. By these alone he stands condemned as a sinner; and since “the wages of sin is death,” he justly perishes, without ever having seen the written law. Thus we see that all men, whatever their condition, are amenable to, and are to be judged by, the law of God. When Paul says that the Gentiles have not the law, he means that they had not the written revelation, but not that they did not have some knowledge of right and wrong, as defined by the moral law. E. J. W. {SITI August 31, 1891, p. 259.26}

**(*To be concluded*.)**