

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY.

CHAPTER I. VERSES 8-17.

THE "commandment" of which St. Paul has spoken, "the preceptive aspect" of the entire revelation of God, leads him to concede¹ that there is a deep sense in which "the law" in its technical significance "is good." This is not a reply to those who, on Gnostic principles, held a diametrically opposite opinion, but simply the utterance of a profound truth lying at the root of all religion. The Law is the revelation of the divine ideal of man. It is God's portrait of the Son of man, of the Second Man before his incarnation. It is therefore beautiful, excellent, invaluable, holy, just, and good.² Its inward nature must be exquisite, genuine, worthy of recognition. If the Law be (*kalos*) "good" it must reflect the agreeable, the satisfactory, the beautiful impression made by what is good in itself. *The law is good, should a man—i.e., a teacher of the Law—make use of it lawfully—i.e., in harmony with its true spirit and intention.* It must not be transformed into a "gospel;" it must not be arbitrarily expanded or curtailed; the mere possession of it must not be made into a ground of acceptance, though it may be wisely regarded as a spur to obedience and a stimulant to conscience. If we would see its real beauty, we must use it in a manner that is congruous with the Divine intention which was conspicuous in its first utterance. The

¹ Heinrichs translates 'οἴδαμεν δὲ, *concedimus*. Ellicott admits a species of *concession* to be conveyed by the particle δὲ in this place.

² Καλός, as well as ἀγαθός, is often the translation in the LXX. of the *tōv* of the O.T. Cf. Cremer's "Biblico-Theological Lexicon," p. 338.

teacher of the Law, moreover, must, if he would thus use it "lawfully," be well aware, must, indeed, have already come to the conclusion, that such *law is not enacted for the righteous man ; but, &c.*

Now before we can interpret this difficult clause, it is requisite to look forward to verse 11, and take into consideration an assertion of immense significance ; which in our opinion, though placed at the end, qualifies the entire foregoing sentence. Different expositors have referred the clause,—*according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed (happy) God wherewith I have been entrusted*, differently ; some have taken the phrase as qualifying the verb rendered, *is contrary to* ; and others have supposed that *the sound healthy doctrine* thus contravened is that which is said to be in harmony with the gospel of God's glory. Great names can be quoted for both references, but the clause stands out prominently, and gives, as it appears to me, a distinctly Pauline force to the entire statement, as soon as we recognise the fact (with De Wette, Huther, and Ellicott) that *according to the gospel of the glory of the happy God*, it is true that no law is enacted for one who, having come under the saving power of that gospel, is "righteous" in God's sight.

This is partially true of all earthly laws and of their sanctions. The lawless man is of all men the least free. He has to face at every turn the clashing force of a Will that is mightier than his ungovernable passion or his inexcusable neglect. The officers and executors and terrors of the law do not exist for a man who is in harmony with the order of society and with the constitution under which he lives.

In the case of the justified and sanctified man this is more conspicuous, and the secret of the gospel assures him that the Law is not enacted for him, just because for him that Law has been transfigured into love. The Law is written on his heart, and embodied in his life.

The passage before us has been greatly contested in the schools, and often misinterpreted. Paul's own teaching furnishes the key. He said to the Romans (vi. 14): "Sin shall not exercise any lordship over you, *because you are not under the law, but under grace.*" And multitudes are "under the law" still. All those who are not "righteous" in the light of the Gospel, and not "righteous" on the condition of faith, are still "under the law" both of restrictions and ordinances. The heathen world is still "under the law." The disciples of Christ who have never surrendered themselves to the mystery of his love are still "under the law." The child needs a definite rule, the obstinate slave needs a penal sanction; but of the man who "walks with God," who is not continuing in sin, who is crucified with Christ and alive again in the power of the Holy Ghost, it may be confidently asserted that he is not "under the law," and that the Law is not enacted for his advantage or his governance. But the difficulty arises, Why should the Apostle exaggerate the offences which are condemned by the ten commandments? Why, when indicating those for whom law is still enacted, does he deepen the horror and pile up the agony of disgust with which the transgressor of the Law should be regarded? This is not an easy question to answer; but, first, let us examine the terms themselves.

The "lawless" and "insubordinate," the "ungodly" and "sinners," head the list of those for whom the law *is* enacted. Now *ἀνόμοις*, translated "lawless" here, does undoubtedly signify, in 1 Cor. ix. 21 and in its adverbial form in Rom. ii. 12, those who are unblest by written law; but the argument of the latter passage is to shew that these are really under an unwritten law, which is inscribed on their hearts. In the majority of cases the word is used to denote those who do set divine law at defiance. The same idea is involved in the usage of the noun *ἀνομία*.¹ The second word (*ἀνυποτάκτοις*) is supposed by Tittmann and Leo (but not by Huther or Ellicott) to have special reference to those who trample upon human law and resist constituted authority. Though it is one of the terms peculiar to the Pastoral Epistles, there is little difficulty in assigning to it the general meaning of "those who recognize no higher will than their own."

The "*ungodly*"—*i. e.*, irreligious and profane—and the "*sinner*" are specially contrasted in 1 Pet. iv. 18 with the "righteous" man, with one who is justified in the sight of God. The four terms denote those who are living in open defiance of the great laws of the first table, to whom the name of God suggests no humbling awe, and the will of God no trembling trust. The idea is put even more vigorously in the next pair of terms (*ἀνοσίοις καὶ βεβήλοις*). The idea of *ὅσιος* differs somewhat from that of *ἅγιος*, in that it represents the inward personal purity of mind which will lead to a separation from sin, and to a refusal of the solicitations to evil. *Ἄγνος* involves specially an

¹ Cf. 2 Thess. ii. 8; Mark xv. 28; Matt. vii. 23; Rom. vi. 19.

actual definite non-commission of impure actions. A man may be *ἀγνος* without being either *ὁσιος* or *ἀγιος*. The word used here denying holiness in the deepest sense implies that the Apostle is speaking of defilement of mind; while "profane" men would trample under foot all spiritual things, would scoff at the name, the glory, the temple, the worship, the rest, and the service of the living God.

At this point the Apostle advances to an exaggerated form of the transgression of the fifth commandment. It has been perceived by many that the E. V. has strained the significance of the word beyond its fair usage.¹ What is said is that the Law is enacted for those utter barbarians who injuriously and roughly treat their parents. In *men-stealers* the worst kind of theft is referred to; and in *sodomites*, the foulest transgression of the seventh commandment. In *liars and perjurers* the most fearful forms of *false witness against a neighbour*; for it is untruthfulness which endeavours to deceive God, as well as man, and to abuse infinite power and righteousness by calling them to aid the devil's lie.

It has been thought by some that Paul, by this terrible enumeration of sins and sinners in phraseology not literally borrowed from the Mosaic law, resolved to shew that the Law would not be evaded by merely keeping to its letter, and that God's written law *à fortiori* condemned forms of vice against which the universal conscience had explicitly pronounced.

My own conviction is that Paul here is aiming to

¹ Plato, "Phædo." c. 62, and other writers use it in a milder sense than *parricide* and *matricide*. Hesychius says it denotes "one who dishonours, smites, or slays his father."

exhibit the pravity of all sin. As our Lord warned men against thoughts, glances, and wishes which were on the same line with overt transgressions, so Paul saw in irreverence for parents what was equivalent to brutal handling, and in adultery a defilement utterly unspeakable, and in all theft a violation of the image of God, and in falsehood a profanation of the name of Him whose promises were "all Yea and Amen." There is no relaxation of the standard of virtue by this mode of putting the claims of law. There is no weakening of the sanctions which condemn lesser forms of these transgressions. The breadth of the phrases used in the earlier portions of the sentence prevents this mistake being made; and the character of the vices which are denounced, from their prevalence in the Roman Empire, and independently of this bold and outspoken repudiation, might have been wilfully condoned by some reckless sympathizers with what was supposed to be Paul's doctrine. The Apostle sweeps out of the way any possible misconception by the comprehensive clause, *and if there be any other thing which contravenes sound doctrine.*

"Sound doctrine"¹ is, as I have already remarked, one of the special phrases which have been singled out as symptomatic of a second-century style. But if any "doctrine" or "words" had already become prevalent which substituted sentimentality for morals—if any justification was then being formally offered for an Antinomian violation of equity, reverence, or purity; if this were being done in the name of a spurious or transcendental philosophy, or of a *doctrine*

¹ Cf. chap. vi. 3; 2 Tim. i. 13; iv. 3; Titus i. 9, and ii. 8.

which was diseased at its very core and poisonous in all its working, there was at least propriety in Paul's speaking of a "healthy teaching" which aimed at moral perfection, at the beauty of holiness, at the power and principle of purity. Having once contrasted in his own mind the wise and healthy influence of a true faith with these sickly professions of a spurious anti-legalism, he was likely to repeat the phrase. It was a compendious expression for the use of Timothy and Titus, which would recall to their mind the lofty standard of excellence that emerged from a personal union with Christ.

The sense, then, of the whole passage is, the Law, according to the very idea of the "Gospel," is not enacted for the justified and sanctified man, but for all the lawless, for all who deliberately violate the spirit and letter of the written law; for all, in fact, who do not accept the full ethical force of the atoning love of God, and who do not submit to the spirit, to the example, to the commands of the Lord Jesus. That noble phrase, "According to the gospel of the glory of the happy God wherewith I have been entrusted," flashes its light back upon the prime idea and governing verb of the sentence; but it does not fail to bring into strong illumination "the doctrine that is according to godliness," the commandment the end of which is LOVE, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.

A few words must be added on the clause itself. The substantive, *δόξης*, is not quite equivalent to "glorious." Strictly speaking, the "Gospel" is defined as "the" gospel of the glory of "the blessed God." That God should be *μακάριος*—an epithet

repeated again in this Epistle (vi. 15)—is in grand opposition to the philosophical conception of the “impassive and unthinkable Essence,” the great unknown and unknowable “tendency” which some of our modern philosophers are borrowing from the Eleatics and Epicureans. That such a conception should be fathered on Prophets or Apostles is a wonderful *tour de force*. In Paul’s mind at least, God was in his own nature “blessed,” or “happy,” in the eternal repose and self-consciousness of his own Being, and in the manifestation of Himself to his creatures. That God should be “happy,” convinces us that his purposes and methods of mercy to man must, by their majesty, fulness, and beauty, overpower the evil of the universe, and sustain Him in bearing the awful burden of existence. The “blessedness” of God is the perfection of his “glory.” The knowledge and utterance of this glory is the Gospel. If we receive this message, and fully know that the Omniscient and Living, Loving, Righteous God is BLESSED, we are saved. With the message to us that comes from this glory of God’s blessedness Paul was “entrusted.”¹

The connection between the foregoing passage and that which follows has been debated somewhat eagerly.² The probable spuriousness of the *καὶ* at the commencement of verse 12³ renders the digression more conspicuous. Still, it is perfectly congruous

¹ On this Pauline usage, see Jell’s “Greek Grammar,” 364. Cf. Rom. iii. 2; Gal. ii. 7.

² Schleiermacher and De Wette say that the thread thus dropped is nevertaken up, and that there is no connection between verses 11 and 12.

³ Tischendorf (eighth edition) has rejected it. See also Ellicott’s textual note.

with the Pauline style to expand a single hint which was ready to his hand, especially when the expansion involved such a reference to his own religious history as would beautifully illustrate the power of the Gospel to charm a sinner into the divine calm of holy obedience, and compel him by inward all-controlling power to loyal service.

Paul has just spoken of that Gospel with which he had been entrusted. The thought of the love and mercy which dictated this wondrous trust is the musical chord which vibrates to the inmost heart of the Apostle, and there peals immediately forth a sonorous note of praise.

I give thanks¹ to him who has wrought mightily within me,² even Christ Jesus our Lord. He does not refer to the external powers of the official Apostolate. Paul often speaks of this inward strengthening, and generally in reference to the invisible and Divine energy wielded by Christ in the soul of man. This is singularly explanatory of the superiority of the Gospel to the Law, as a sanctifying force.

That (= because: the ὅτι introduces here the reason, the cause, of Paul's gratitude) he esteemed me faithful—or trustworthy—in obvious reference to the trust of which he had already spoken—in that he appointed me to ministerial service;³ the

¹ Cf., for this usage, Luke xvii. 9; 2 Tim. i. 3; Heb. xii. 28.

² Jelf, "Greek Grammar," § 468, obs. 6, compares this apposition of ideas with others in which the second clause defines more closely the significance of the first. Cf. Matt. xiv. 20.

³ Here is an important illustration of the fact that the participial aorist does not always refer to a time antecedent to that of the principal verb. The appointment to ministerial service was not anterior to the gracious judgment here spoken of.

appointment being the proof that Christ did thus regard Paul.

“I received the truth,” he cries, “*though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a doer of outrage.*” This self-accusation is thoroughly Pauline,¹ and the reference to his former career of antagonism to the Blessed Lord is a striking note of Pauline thought, for the remembrance haunted him like a spectre, though often the spectral memory transformed itself into the lustrous shining of a cloud when it reflects back the light which at one time it availed utterly to conceal. The terms used here are unusually strong, but justified by the declaration in the *Acts*, that Paul compelled others to “blaspheme” the holy name. It implies that he had warnings of conscience, which aggravated the sin of his ignorance. He who had seen Stephen die for Christ, and after this did not cease to pant like a wild beast for the blood of the Church, must have known that he had not been guilty of simply reviling men, but of blaspheming God.

The word *ὕβριστής* is used of “the doer of outrage.”² The consideration which made the remembrance so bitter and the Divine forgiveness seem so wonderful, was that the real object of this contumelious conduct was the Lord Himself.

*But notwithstanding all this, I received mercy,*³

¹ Cf. Gal. i. 13; Phil. iii. 6; and the speeches in Acts xxii. 4; xxvi. 9.

² Archbishop Trench, “Synonyms of G. T.,” compares it with *ἀλαζών* and *ὑπερίφανος*, the former of which shews the same spirit in *speech*, and the latter in *thought*, while our word here shews it in “uppish” and insolent deeds.

³ From the reflective receptive sense of the middle voice of this verb *ἐλέω*, there arises the receptive sense of the I. aor. pass., *ἠλείθην*. Jelf. “Greek Grammar,” § 354.

seeing that, being ignorant, I acted in unbelief. The *ὅτι* here does not state the ultimate cause or ground of the Divine mercy; but it introduces a consideration which modified his guilt and prevented his conduct from being an insuperable bar to forgiveness, which it might have become if it had been as ungodly and rebellious as it seemed.

There is no decision involved here on the "merit," or predisposing "congruity" in the virtues, of those who are as yet unbelievers, but there is a burning ray of light shot upon the degree to which ignorance modifies the culpability of unbelief. The passage does not stand alone. Christ prayed for his murderers: "Father, forgive them: they know not what they do." Elsewhere (1 Cor. ii. 7) St. Paul declares that "the princes of this world, *had they known it*, would not have crucified the Lord of glory;" and (Rom. x. 2) he says that his own loved Israel had "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." It is true that moral unbelief beclouds the judgment, and often obscures evidence, and hides the features of truth, and thus conduces to ignorance. Further, a certain amount of trust, of receptivity, of intellectual and moral surrender, is an antecedent to accurate knowledge; yet the higher acts of faith are dependent on lower degrees of knowledge. Man cannot be held responsible to the full for not believing that which he has never adequately understood, and there is an "ignorance" which greatly modifies the blameworthiness of "unbelief." Paul was a "blasphemer, persecutor, and doer of outrage," not because he hated the light: not that he was indifferent to the claims of God or to

the need of redemption, but because he was ignorant of the Lord whom he persecuted, and thought that he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Such ignorance may entail fearful consequences and privations of privilege, but can never be judged at the bar of conscience with the condemnation passed on the unbelief of passion, self-indulgence, or wilful rebellion. Deliberate rejection of God as God, of Divine love when it is known to be Divine love, is the sin which in its very nature is "presumptuous," and apparently irremissible. But where the mind is too ignorant, or darkened or prejudiced to the force of evidence adequate under other circumstances, then the unbelief and practical disobedience which ensue, through the infinite mercy of God, do not exclude from hope. Thousands obtain mercy, seeing that they too act ignorantly in unbelief.

The strong and unusual word which Paul now uses, if we may judge from the force of similar verbal compounds elsewhere,¹ has a superlative force. Great emphasis is laid on the *superabundance*, the exceeding and boundless fulness of the grace that was lavished on him, and the preposition (*μετὰ*) expresses the accompaniments,² the subjective aspect of the grace, viz., *faith and love*, whose object and sphere were *in Christ Jesus*. Over and above the mercy which opened his eyes to the transcendent excellence of Christ, Divine grace had awakened faith and love in his heart, and transformed the persecutor into an apostle.

¹ ὑπερπεπλούνασε. Cf. Rom. v. 20; viii. 37; 2 Cor. xi. 5; Phil. ii. 9.

² See, for the like use *μετὰ*, Heb. xii. 17

Verse 15.—Then he quotes one of the “faithful sayings,” one of the musical and heaven-breathed utterances, which may possibly have been first poured forth in prophetic afflatus by himself, and which had been taken hold of as a watchword, treasured as a compendium of God’s truth, passed from lip to lip, from Church to Church, and land to land, as more precious than fine gold, more sacred than sacramental food, the patrimony of the Christian Household, the regalia of the Heavenly Commonwealth.

On several occasions Paul refers to the “faithful sayings.”¹ Once he is said by Luke to have quoted certain words of the Lord Jesus Himself (Acts xx. 35) with which the Ephesian elders were presumed to be familiar. And now he appeals to a sentence, and therefore to an underlying reality of transcendent interest, which he knew was “worthy of every kind of reception.”² That is, that every faculty of mind, heart, and will should be put in requisition to receive this truth; that every possible way in which acquiescence and admission could be yielded to the truth was amply deserved. Utterly, absolutely, universally trustworthy is the saying, the *λόγος*, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*. John would write in this same Ephesus, not long after: “*The Light which lighteth every man* *CAME into the world.*” Here, however, Paul anticipates his teaching, and deems it a “common-place” of primitive Christian belief, that from a

¹ Cf. 1 Tim. iii. 1; iv. 9; 2 Tim. ii. 11; Tit. iii. 8.

² If the classical usage of *πας* with the article and noun is here followed, the above translation is necessary. Wettstein, however, translates, “*Certissima res est et digna quam omni studio et cupide omnes complectentur probentque.*”

pre-existent condition "Christ came into the world." The phrase may be used of ordinary birth, but it is an awkward extravagance, unless more than human parentage and earthly development were being thought of. Christ continually used language which could not fail to have suggested the same idea. He *came* not so much to rule over Israel, or to enlighten the nations, as *to save sinners*. Let it be noticed, that Paul adopts the very term already used to denote compendiously all those for whom the Law was enacted. This is the word which (Gal. ii. 15) he had used as descriptive of the Gentile outcast, of the world beyond the reach of the Old Covenant of Promise, without hope and without God. Christ Jesus came into the world to *save* these. It is but a concentrated expression of the various words of Jesus, how "the Son of man had come not to destroy but to save." What was involved in "salvation" is not stated, nor is the method of his grace. Paul assumes that "the saying" told its own story. He had personally found it the divinest truth. He even goes a step further, and says: "Of all sinners I am the chief or foremost." Numerous have been the efforts made to take from this expression the obvious meaning belonging to it. Some have declared that Paul was, or must have been, a transmigrated appearance of Adam's soul, and many of the Fathers endeavour to eviscerate the phrase of its force. It is interesting to find *Cornelius-a-Lapide* rejecting the interpretation of *Ambrose* and *Thomas Aquinas*, and making the wise suggestion that "Paul knew his own sins by experience and every other man's *per*

speculationem, and they must have been to him the most aggravated of all sins." Francis of Assisi, and Bradford and John Bunyan, and many another saint of God, has confirmed the same interpretation of these memorable words. The like humility and self-knowledge which prompted Paul to say he was "not fit to be called an apostle," dictated this burning utterance: *Howbeit, for this cause, I obtained mercy, in order that*—the purpose of the Divine mercy towards him is very forcibly expressed—*in me, i. e.*, taking my whole nature as the sphere of its working, both in the depths of my being and in the whole of my destiny,—*in me, the very foremost of sinners*, not first in point of time, but chiefest in respect of conscious unworthiness, *Christ Jesus*, as the great agent of Divine grace, *might illustrate for his own purposes*¹ *the whole extent and contents of his longsuffering*. The use of the article before *ἅπασαν* justifies this representation. "Longsuffering" (Trench) is generally used for patient and magnanimous conduct towards *persons*, while *ὑπομονή* is used of the quiet endurance of circumstances, sins, or events.

The object of this display of Divine forbearance in Paul was, *with the view of producing a typical representation of those who should hereafter believe upon him unto life eternal*. The preposition (*πρὸς*) has this causal force, introducing the object or result of the action of the verb. There is a slight deviation from Pauline phraseology in the use of the word "pattern," but it was justified by the connection.

¹ The word occurs eleven times in Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews in this sense. See Jelf's "Greek Grammar," section 363, for the reflexive force of the verb.

If Christ can save *him*, Paul feels He is able to save to the uttermost all who shall ever after believe on Him.

Then comes the sublime doxology which was ever burning in his heart and seeking expression on his lips. Paul was always ready for a song of praise, for a burst of glorious awe. *Now to the King of the ages*, of those ages of human history and Divine revelation which shadow forth and help us to conceive eternity, those "ages" which express infinite duration, all the cycles of both time and space; *to the Incorruptible, Invisible, Only God.*¹ These phrases are to be found elsewhere (Rom. i. 23; John i. 18). Mack, De Wette, and Ellicott attribute these perfections to God, rather than to the *King of the Ages*. Huther and Alford regard them as separate abstractions. The phrase is a grand testimony to the monotheism of Paul. The Godhead, the Trinity of his worship, is a sublime Unity. To this eternal, incorruptible One *be glory and honour unto the ages of the ages. Amen.* The sweep of the thought is vast, and the weight of it crushing, and the glory of it baffling. We have lost by familiarity of use the overwhelming awe that filled the soul of Paul when he realised his own salvation.

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¹ $\sigma\phi\omega$ is not in the best manuscripts.