

THE SOUL'S GREAT CRISIS.

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“For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” — Romans 7:8, 9.

I REMEMBER once reading a chapter of a book which commenced with this heading, “The Inside of the World.” The book, of course, was occupied very much with geology, and to speculations about the interior of the globe. To-night I want you to consider not the inside of the world, but the little world within us, that microcosm, the human heart, and some strange things that happen therein, and especially one singular and mysterious work which goes on in the minds of those who come the children of God. They are brought from one state into another by a very remarkable process; a process which, while they are undergoing it, they do not understand; and for want of knowing what it is, and what God is driving at, some of them are often driven to very great dependency — some even to despair. Whereas if they would see in the text what I shall try to hold up and expound — a kind of looking-glass, in which they might see a reflection of their hearts and their own experience — they might, perhaps, come into light and liberty all the sooner. May it be so, even now.

We shall speak of the words of the Apostle first in this way. Here is life without the law; here is, secondly, sin coming to light; and hereto is, thirdly, the man himself — death brought by the law to him. And, first, let me speak of: —

I. LIFE WITHOUT THE LAW.

The Apostle says that sin was at one time dead in him, and he was alive without the law. Now when he says “without the law” he does not mean that he never heard the law read, for it was read in the synagogue every Sabbath. He does not moan that he did not know it, for he was probably acquainted with every letter of it. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees according to his own profession; and they were a sect much addicted to the study not only of the law, but of the jots and titles of it; they held, in fact, constant discussions and disputes with one another about the minute particulars of that law.

He knew the law in the letter of it, and understood it so far as it could be understood from his point of view, but yet he says he was alive without the law, by which he means this — the law had never come home to his heart and to his conscience. It was because of this, therefore, that he was living in a state of false security. He thought he had kept it. He believed that if anyone in the world had kept the commandments from his youth up, he, Saul of Tarsus, was that man. He did not dread dying, or standing before the judgment-seat of God: he felt himself perfectly ready for that. Wrapped up in his own law-keeping, he felt himself perfectly secure. He was at ease and, peace. Nothing disturbed, him. He did not lie sleepless on his bed at night, thinking of his iniquity; on the contrary, he lulled himself to sleep with some such a prayer as this: “God, I thank thee I am not as other men are — an adulterer or extortioner, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week. I pay tithes of all I possess.” He thought he was perfectly safe; that he was doing all he ought to do, leaving nothing undone that he ought to have done; that he was, in fact, in excellent repute in heaven, and he was certainly on the vary best possible terms with himself. The consequence of this was that he was alive without the law.

In another sense his security brought him pride; he looked down upon all others. If by chance a Publican met him in the street, he gave him all the room he could. If he ever passed by a woman that was a sinner, he took care to look quite another way, or to let her see how scornfully he thought of her. If, perchance, he mentioned a Gentile, he called him a dog; for this great one, Saul of Tarsus, had so kept the law, and felt so quiet and peaceful within, that he could afford to stand on the very pinnacle of eminence and look down with derision on those poorer mortals who were not so good as he.

The next step to that, Paul, who was a thorough-going one, took, he indulged in persecution; for as soon as you think yourself better than others, you become the judge of others, and the next step is to carry out your own sentence upon others. And inasmuch as this Saul of Tarsus heard that there were some who did not believe that they were as good as he, who did not profess to be saved, as he expected to be by his own doings, but who talked of one Jesus, who was the Son of God, who had died for their sins, and who had risen from the dead and given them pardon — when he heard that they were trusting to the merits of this glorious One, whom, they said, had ascended to the right hand of God, he was exceeding mad against them. Why, they were opposed to his theory of his own excellence! They were practically protesting against his very comfortable state of mind! they were, in fact, setting up altogether an opposition doctrine which laid the axe to the root of the tree of his belief and might fell the goodly tree, beneath which he found such shelter. So he began at once to hale them to prison, to compel them to blaspheme in the name of Christ if he could, and when he had harried them through Jerusalem, and punished them with all his might in his own country, then he must needs seek letters from the high priest that he might go to Damascus to carry out the self-same measures there. Paul was indeed alive. He was not only as good as he ought to be, but he was rather better, and he now set out to make other people better. If he could not make men better by his talking to them, he would make them better by scourging and killing them. Great “I,” how lofty it stood! How it held up its head! “I was alive,” said he. But alas! Paul, thou didst not understand the law that soon would have cut thee down and killed thee, and killed thine “I,” and brained thee, and left thee dead on the spot. Now in what respect was Paul alive without the law? To answer this we will not speak so much of Paul as of many others who are in the same state. Some are alive without the law because they have never seen the spirituality of it. Their notion was that “thou shalt not commit adultery meant simply an act of uncleanness. They felt perfectly innocent therefore. But if they had known that it meant a great deal more — that the law condemned them if there had been even an unclean thought, and that uncleanness of heart was as obnoxious to God as uncleanness of life, then their life would soon have been to an end—their life of pride and security — for they would have found that the law would not give them the shelter, though they thought it did. “Thou shalt not kill.” Why, there is no man here, I suppose, but what would say, “I am clear there. I have never killed anybody.” But, my dear friend, I can understand your being alive without

the law, if you do not know as you ought to know that that commandment means that even anger is murder, and he that is angry with his brother has killed him in his heart. What if you have never struck him! yet if you would have liked to do so. What if it never came to actually felling him to the ground! — yet if you have spoken bitter words — these show what you would have done, and this is set down in God’s Book as being a sin — a sin for which he will require you to give an account at the last great day. Now Paul had never seen this, but once upon a time, and that was through the little window of that commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” Paul saw the light, and he said to himself, “What! does this law condemn me for having a covetous desire?” “Ah! then,” said he, “I am not so secure as I thought I was; I cannot afford to be proud; I cannot afford to judge others: I may judge myself.” He lived in that proud, haughty life because he did not understand the law.

There are many others who are living in the same self-righteous way — good self-righteous people, wrapping themselves up in the garment of their goodness because they have really been very careless about what the law is. They have not looked into it. Whether there be a Law of God or not, has really never been thoroughly and deeply considered by them. They know it as a matter of religious teaching, but nothing more. O sir, how easily ought your conscience to convict you; for when a subject does not even care to know whether a king has a law or not, what a traitor he is already! When he says, “It is no business of mine to know the king’s will. I do not care what the king’s will is” — why, if he hath committed no overt offense, that of itself is an offense, he stands out as one convicted of being a traitor, and guilty of sedition and treason against his king.

There are others who say in their heart, if they won’t put it into words, for most fools, according to David, are not such fools as to speak out loud — “The fool hath said in his heart,” saith David — “they say in their heart, how doth God know, and is there knowledge with the Most High? What if we do break his law — does he care about it?” And then they cap it all by saying, “Is he not very merciful? He won’t be severe with us poor creatures. What if we have offended? We will whisper a prayer or two when we are dying, and all will be blotted out.” Thou thinkest that God is such an one as thyself. Because thou canst trifle with sin, thou imaginest Jehovah can do so. Oh! if thou didst but know his law, didst but understand how inflexible it is, and how true is his declaration that he will by no means spare the guilty, which means he will by no means spare thee,

thou wouldst soon lay aside this easy-going life of thine, and no longer couldst thou live as thou dost now live: thou wouldst be slain by the word of the Lord.

In addition to these, I have no doubt that there are many professors of religion who are living without the law. I mean that they are living reputable, respectable Christian lives, and they themselves believe they are converted, but they are alive without the law. That is, there is mingled with their faith in Christ some sort of trust in themselves. They have never seen that the law puts an end to all human power, strength, and merit as any assistance to Christ in the matter of salvation. I have sometimes wished that some of our younger brethren and sisters who do not seem to have felt very deeply in their hearts the work of Christ, might for once feel what it is for the commandment to come into their souls and lay them prostrate; for if it ever did, then their new life which they would receive from Christ would be of a deeper and I trust of a more effective power on their hearts and lives, and upon their general walk towards Christ and his Church.

You see then, dear friends, there is such a thing as being alive without the law. A man may be in such a state as to think it is all right because he does not know the law, and let me say there is no more foolish and dangerous condition in the world than this. A man who has never cared about the law, and does not know it, and therefore concludes that he is righteous, is like a person who thinks he is rich, or tries to think he is, and keeps up a large house and his carriage with a large expenditure. Can he afford it? How about his books? Well, he has had some few difficulties but he met one debt by a loan, and when that loan comes due he will meet that with another. He says he is all right — he believes he is all right — he thinks he is all right. Does he ever read his books? Oh! no; he says they are very dry reading. He does not want any stocktaking; he does not want anybody to look into his affairs. Now without any kind of guesswork, every business man knows how that will end; he knows that it means bankruptcy — ruin. So it does; with a man who says, “All right, I do not care to enquire about my soul-affairs. I dare say it is as I hope it is — I think it is, and I am not going to concern myself about it.” It will end in everlasting bankruptcy, my dear hearer — sure to, sure to; it cannot be anything else. You are like a ship at sea that ought to have been long ago given up to the shipbreaker. There she is out at sea. The captain does not care to enquire whether the timbers are sound, or whether they are well caulked, or whether the pumps will work well or not. She has seemed to go very well in fair weather, and

he does not care to know anything else. There is none of us who would like to go to sea in a vessel like that. We should want to know whether the vessel would stand the strain of a storm, whether she was seaworthy, and, if she were not so, we would rather keep on shore. Many of you are in rotten vessels to-night — ships that are wormeaten through and through, and you will find them go to pieces when once a storm comes up. God have mercy upon you and deliver you from these false hopes, and this living without the law; and may the law come on board your vessel even now, and begin to try the timbers, and if you should stand by and discover that the thing is only fit to be broken up, why, then I trust you will get on board a better vessel, a vessel that shall stand all storms, of whom Christ is the Captain — a vessel which, indeed, is Christ himself. Now we must pass on to the second point.

II. THE REVIVAL OF SIN.

Paul says, “The commandment came, and sin revived. It seemed to him before as if it were quite dead. He did not believe he had any great sin in him. Other people might have, but Saul of Tarsus was so God there could not be much sin in him. “But when the commandment came, sin revived. “What does it mean by the commandment coming? It means this, that he saw its meaning. He never saw before — that it had respect to his thoughts, his wishes, and desires. Now that he saw this, sin revived in him. It means, next, that he saw that the law was not a thing to be trifled with, that the law of God was not meant to be written, and there to lie like a dead letter, but that God had sworn by himself that he would carry out that law, and would not spare those who dared to break it; that he would execute judgement upon all those who defy him to his face and break his commandment. When he saw that, the commandment had come, and sin revived.

But best of all this, Saul of Tarsus felt, as I know many of you have, the power of the law working on the soul. There is no sharper instrument with which to lance the soul than the broken law of God. There is no harrow that can tear the soul like that harrow of the ten commandments. There is no arrow that can go forth and slay the soul’s self-satisfaction as God’s commandments do when we see that they are holy, just, and good, and that we have broken every one of them — broken them a thousand times, and that every breach of the law is calling out for vengeance against us. It is a dreadful thing, but a necessary thing, that we should all of us have the

commandment thus coming home to us. Paul thought it was buried. But directly the commandment came, sin revived. He means by that that he now saw that sins that had laid buried without monuments suddenly burst their cerements and rose up like the dead on the day of resurrection. “There they are,” he seemed to say — “the commandments have come, and my sins, like a great cloud, have revived — they live, and every one points at and accuses me as the law condemns me.”

Then sin revived in another sense, for Paul said to himself, “How could God have given me such a law? How can he be so stern and strict? I do not love this law neither do I love God.” He thought he did until then. When he understood the law, he found that he did not either love God or the law; and the rebellion which had always been in his spirit now began to show itself, and he began in his heart to feel a hatred against the law that condemned him, and against the God whom he had offended. Sin revived. The very display of the law produced it, and yet though it was thus manifested, it had always been there. Saul did not know it, but sin had always been there, and all that the law did was to come with a candle and just show him what he never thought was there. A person goes down into a cellar that has been shut up for a long time, and there are lots of foul creatures on the floor and spiders on the wall. He goes down without a candle, and he does not see them. But another time he takes the candle, and how soon he wishes to get out of the place. Now the candle shows him the spiders and the other loathsome things, but it does not make them, it only shows what existed before. The law does that. Perhaps those loathsome creatures were all quiet while there was darkness, but when the candle came there they scurried to and fro to escape its light; all the things which otherwise had slept. And when the law comes, it just does that — it lets out all the loathsomeness of our sinful nature which had been dammed up before — it lets it go forth, and we find out that it was there already, and always there, and then, like the writer of this memorable Epistle.

We say, “Sin revived and I died.” “A strange experience!” you will tell me, but I assure you it is only the usual experience of the children of God. It is the way in which we have been brought to Christ. The law has come to us, and sin has revived in us, and we have died. Now the third point is to show what Paul means by saying he “died.”

III. THE MEANING OF DEATH THROUGH THE LAW.

What died in Paul was that which ought never to have lived. It was that great “I” in Paul — “sin revived, and I died “ — that “I” that used to say, “I thank thee that I am not as other men” — that “I” that folded its arms in satisfied security — that “I” that bent its knee in prayer, but never bowed down the heart in penitence — that “I” died. The law killed it. It could not live in such light as that. It was a creature only fit for darkness, and when the law came this great “I” died.

And I think it means this: First, he died in this respect: he saw he was condemned to die. He heard pronounced upon himself the sentence of condemnation. He had just thought so — he would have felt insulted if anybody had told him so, but now he seemed to see the great Judge of all, summoning him before him and accusing him of having broken these commands, and saying, “Depart ye cursed one, for thou hast broken my law.” He died, then, in the sense that he felt condemnation pronounced upon him. A dreadful feeling that!

Then not all his hopes from his past life died. He used to look back with great comfort upon his fastings, his almsgivings and temple-going, but now he felt, “What an awful hypocrite I have been all along, for I have only been there with my body — my heart never went there. I was keeping God’s laws, I thought, but I never loved that law at all; I find now I hated it. Or, if I had understood what it was, I should have hated it. I only loved the shell of it; I did not know its kernel. I merely loved its outward breath because I hoped to gain by it, but the law itself I did not love, nor God either.” So all the past withered up, and the Paul — the Saul — the “I” that had been so great as to his past, died.

And then again, all his hopes as to the future died. Before, when he had fallen into any outward sin, he had always said to himself, “Never mind, we will do better next time: we shall mend this matter yet; we will keep the law in future; we will make the phylacteries wider and the garments broader; but now he saw that:

*“Could his tears for ever flow,
Could his zeal no respite know,
All for sin could not atone.”*

He had broken the law, and all attempts to keep it in the future could not mend the past breaches and transgressions; and he knew that as he had broken it in the past he would be sure to break it in the future, and in that

respect he died. And then again, all his powers seemed to die. Formerly he had said, "I can keep the law," but now, when he saw the blaze of this mysterious holiness, when he perceived that every thought, word, and wish would condemn him, he sat at the foot of Sinai and trembled, and entreated that those words might not be spoken to him any more. He felt the law was too great, too terrible for him to hope ever to keep it, and he fell at the feet of the law as one that was dead. So died all his hopes. Now he felt that he was condemned for ever. The last ray of hope was gone. And mark, there is no despair that is more deep than the despair of one who was once quite secure, and even boastful. Many have I seen who were once self-righteous, and I have pitied them from my heart. When God has turned his blazing light of truth on all their life, righteousness has gone. Oh! they have not known what to do; they have wished they had never been born. Like John Bunyan, they have wished they had been frogs or toads sooner than be men. They had felt they could have cursed the day of their birth, now that all hope was gone once for all. And when they have told me of this, all I could do was to smile in their faces and say, "Thank God! I am very glad of it," and then they have thought me cruel, but I have said, "It must be so, for now you will be saved." God must clear away all your rubbish before he can give his grace.

So with this I shall conclude. If there are any of you to-night passing through what I have described — if you are as one dead to-night because your former hopes have been killed by the law, I am so glad of it. But let me tell you, do not think your case an unusual one. Do not go home and say, "I have been killed." Thousands of God's servants have been the same. Ah! when I had made the discovery that I had broken God's law so often, and that I must perish and be cast into hell on account of my sins, I do remember what sin wrought in me, and what loathing of myself I felt; and that by the space of months and years together, because I did not hear the gospel fully preached, for, had I, I must have got peace much sooner. Now you, dear friends, will be helped to-night when I tell you it is nothing unusual. It is a valley of the shadow of death, but most pilgrims go through it, and all go through it more or less; and I am glad of it. When the Countess of Huntingdon said to Whitfield, "What makes you look so sad, Mr. Whitfield?" he replied, "Oh! I may well look sad, for I am lost." "Oh!" said she, "Mr. Whitfield, I am so glad, for Jesus Christ came to seek and save that which was lost." I could preach all night if I had a congregation that felt themselves quite lost, because then they would be sure to be

saved. It would be no use preaching else. When the law once preaches, it makes you weep and feel you are lost. And then, when you are like the soil that is well ploughed ready for the seed to be scattered in the furrows, the precious seed will be scattered, and, perhaps, before long, up springs the harvest: you are blessed and God is glorified.

Let me say to any that has been killed by the law, "It was needful that you should be. You may now understand where salvation lies. You have no merits of your own; you do not want any. Christ has all the merits that you want to take you to heaven." But can you get Christ's merit? Aye, get it to-night. If thou wilt with the heart believe on the Lord Jesus, and with the mouth make confession of him, thou shalt be saved. If thou wilt trust him to save thee, he will save thee, and his merit shall be thine. As long as thou hast any good in thyself, I know thou wilt have nothing from Christ, but when all thy hope from thine own merit is laid at the foot of the law, then what an opportunity there is for the gospel to come in! It comes, and it says this, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It points you to Jesus crucified, who carried your sins, who was punished instead of you — shows you how God's justice has been satisfied in Christ. Believe and live! Take the mercy God freely offers you. Take it without money and without price. Take it without fitness or preparation. Take it now; simply take it as God presents it to you. Just as you are without having any plea but the one plea that Jesus died — just as you are — take Jesus, and put yourself on him. What can you do otherwise, you dead one? What can you do otherwise, you filthy one? You are condemned, you are guilty; God has pronounced your sentence. Touch the silver scepter now, freely held out to you. You cannot be saved by works. Let others try it if they will; you cannot, you know you cannot. Oh! then, be saved by grace. God freely offers it by his dear Son in the preached gospel. He will not deny it to any one of you, however black you may have been, or however vile you may feel yourself to be. You have but to come, but to trust, but to believe in Jesus, but to rely upon him, to throw yourself upon him, to lean on him, to hang on him, to depend on him, and you will be saved. Oh! that the Lord may grant you grace to do so! And I know he will; if you have been slain by the law, he will make you alive by the gospel; for have you never read the words, "I kill and I make alive. I wound and I heal"? Oh! the mercy of that "I heal"! He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds; he will have regard to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their prayer. "I am poor and

needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me” — is not that you again? “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Ah! soul, what good news for you, that if the law has killed you, you did not want the law; you have got Christ, who is better! You can have salvation still, though you forfeited it by your own works. You can have that from mercy which you cannot have from justice; you may have that from Jesus which you might never have from Moses. I want to preach but a short sermon. Sometimes they are all the better remembered so. God bless you, and write the truth on your hearts Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON.

PSALM 110; ROMANS 2:25-29; 3.

Verses 1, 2. *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*

You do not need a comment upon this Psalm wizen you remember how our Lord himself applied it to himself. It is David speaking concerning the Son of David, who is also David’s Lord and our King, who at this hour is sitting at the right hand of Jehovah, the Lord of all; waiting until his monarchy shall be extended visibly over all creation.

3. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.*

Christ, like the rising sun, shall not come alone in his brightness, but, as with the sun we see an innumerable company of sparkling dewdrops, so shall the forces of Christ be as numerous as the drops of the morning dew which spring from the womb of the morning. God’s infinite grace shall lead forth willing troops when Christ shall come.

4. *The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

That is, a priestly king, a kingly priest — priest and king united in one person.

5. *The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.*