

The Gospel a Law of Liberty

by J.H. Newman

The Gospel is a law of liberty, and Christ's commands are often implied rather than explicitly stated, allowing for a more personal and discretionary approach to faith and practice.

Scripture: Genesis 2:3, Malachi 3:10, Matthew 5:19, Luke 22:19, Acts 2:42, Acts 16:15, 1 Corinthians 5:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Titus 3:10, Hebrews 10:25

Topics: "Christian Liberty", "Gospel Freedom"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the ecclesiastical system in Scripture, emphasizing that the Bible teaches matters of faith essential for salvation rather than detailed discipline. He explains that the Gospel is a Law of Liberty, treating believers as sons who love God, and challenges them to show their love for Christ as Lord and Savior. Newman highlights that while the ecclesiastical system is faintly traced in Scripture, it aims to guide believers on what is most likely to please Christ, often through examples, implications, and comparisons of passages.

Transcript

It is a matter of surprise to some persons, that the ecclesiastical system under which we find ourselves, is so faintly enjoined on us in Scripture. One very sufficient explanation of the fact will be found in considering that the Bible is not intended to teach us matters of discipline so much as matters of faith; i. e. those doctrines, the reception of which are necessary to salvation. But another reason may be suggested, which is well worth our attentive consideration.

The Gospel is a Law of Liberty. We are treated as sons, not as servants; not subjected to a code of formal commands, but addressed as those who love GOD, and wish to please Him. When a man gives orders to those whom he thinks will mistake him, or are perverse, he speaks pointedly and explicitly; but when he gives directions to friends, he will trust much to their knowledge of his feelings and wishes, he leaves much to their discretion, and tells them not so much what he would have done in detail, as what are the objects he would have accomplished. Now this is the way CHRIST has spoken to us under the New Covenant; and apparently with this reason, to try us, whether or not we really love Him as our LORD and SAVIOUR.

Accordingly, there is no part, perhaps, of the ecclesiastical system, which is not faintly traced in Scripture, and no part which is much more than faintly traced. The question which a reverend and affectionate faith will ask, is "what is most likely to please CHRIST?" And this is just the question that obtains and answer in

Scripture; which contains just so much as intimations of what is most likely to please Him. Of course different minds will differ as to the degree of clearness with which this or that practice is enjoined, yet I think no one will consider the state of the case, as I have put it, exaggerated on the whole.

Many duties are intimated to us by example, not by precept-many are implied merely-others can only be inferred from a comparison of passages-and others perhaps are contained only in the Jewish Law. I will mention some specimens to assist the reflection of the reader.

The early Christians were remarkable for keeping to the Apostles' fellowship. Who are more likely to stand in the Apostles' place since their death, that that line of Bishops which they themselves began? for that the Apostles were in some sense or other to remain on earth to the end of all things, is plain from the text, "Lo, I am with you alway," &c.

St. Paul set Timothy over the Church at Ephesus, and Titus over the Churches at Crete; i. e. as Bishops; therefore it is safer to have Bishops now, it is more likely to be pleasing to Him who has loved us, and bids us in turn love Him with the heart, not with formal service.

Our LORD committed the Administration of the LORD'S SUPPER to His Apostles; DO THIS in remembrance of Me;"-therefore the Church has ever continued it in the hands of their Successors, and the delegates of these.

From CHRIST'S words, "Suffer the little children," &c. and from His blessing them, we infer His desire that children should be brought near to Him in baptism;-as we do also from St. Paul's conduct on several occasions. Acts xvi. 15, 33. 1 Cor. i. 16.

So also we continue the practice of Confirmation, from a desire to keep as near the Apostles' rule as possible.

Again, what little is there of express command in the New Testament for our meeting together in public worship, in large congregations! Yet we see what the custom of the Apostolic Church was from the book of Acts, 1 Cor. &c. and we follow it.

In like manner, the words in Genesis ii and the practice of the Apostles in Acts, are quite warrant enough for the Sanctification of the LORD'S Day, even though the fourth Commandment were not binding on us.

For the same reason we continue the Patriarchal and Jewish rule of paying tithe to the Church. Some portion of our goods is evidently due to GOD;-and the ancient Divine Command is a direction to us, which the law of the land has made obligatory, in a case where reason and conscience have no means of determining.

These may be taken as illustrations of a general principle. And at this day it is most needful to keep it in view, since a cold spirit has crept into the Church of demanding rigid demonstration for every religious practice and observance. It is the fashion now to speak of those who maintain the ancient rules of the ecclesiastical system, not as zealous servants of CHRIST, not as wise and practical expounders of His will, but as inconclusive reasoners, and fanciful theorists, merely because, instead of standing still and arguing, they have a heart to obey. Are there not numbers in this day, who think themselves enlightened believers, yet who are but acting the part of the husbandman's son in the Gospel, who said, "I go, sir,"-AND WENT NOT.

CHURCH REFORM.

Surely, before the blessing of a Millennium were vouchsafed to us, if it be to come, the whole Christian world has much to confess in its several branches. Rome has to confess her Papal corruptions, and her cruelty toward those who refuse to accept them. The Christian communities of Holland, Scotland, and other countries, their neglect of the Apostolical Order of Ministers. The Greek Church has to confess its saint-worship, its formal fasts, and its want of zeal. The Churches of Asia their heresy. All parts of Christendom have much to confess and reform. We have our sins as well as the rest. Oh that we would take the lead in the renovation of the Church Catholic on Scripture principles!

Our greatest sin perhaps is the disuse of a godly discipline." Let the reader consider,

1. The command.

"Put away from yourselves the wicked person." "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject." "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses, and avoid them."

2. The example, viz. in the Primitive Church.

"The Persons or Objects of Ecclesiastical Censure were all such delinquents, as fell into great and scandalous crimes after baptism, whether men or women, priest or people, rich or poor, princes or subjects." Bing. Antiq. xvi. 3.

3. The warning.

"Whosoever.... shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven."

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