

Trinity XIV

I take as my text from St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians:

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

There's been a longstanding saying: ***You can't legislate morals.***

No doubt we've all heard this saying many times. It was said about prohibition, and, more recently, it has been associated with the abortion rights issue.

There is probably a lot of truth to the saying, for, indeed, governments can make and enforce laws which regulate our actions in a human society, but our morality or the spiritual side of our nature is governed by a higher authority.

Laws enacted by governments do not convey morality. For example: under secular law, to allow or disallow murder does not make it morally right or morally wrong; to allow or disallow abortion does not make it morally right or morally wrong.

Truly, these are moral issues but, again, it is not the law in and of itself that conveys morality. There is more to it.

More to the point, just because the law prevents us from assaulting or murdering our neighbor does not make us love our neighbor.

And this is the point that Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, is trying to make, a point that we can come to understand when we consider secular law in juxtaposition to the **Law of Love**.

Every aspect of life had been regulated under the **Mosaic Law**; seemingly nothing has been overlooked. And that was the **Old Law**.

But through Christ, we, as Christians, have been set free from the **Law** of the Old Testament and all its externals — set free from the **Old Law**.

The Galatians were having some difficulty, however, with this new-found freedom, and Paul sought to remind them that this liberty through Christ does not mean abandoning moral restraints or to be an excuse for indulging the lower instincts. Paul emphasized that the Christian is under the **Law of Love**.

What is extraordinary, revolutionary, in Paul's teaching on this point is the difference between the two laws, the Mosaic Law and the Law of Love: one is a law to do, and the other a law to be — to do or to be.

The Law of Love is not concerned with a list of external observances; rather, it is a command to be, as in to be loving, a command which we can never fully obey; thus we must continually fall back on divine inspiration.

The shift, according to Paul, is from dutiful obedience to loving response.

Paul had written to the Galatians in response to their lapses into doubt, and he was concerned with their falling away from the simple Gospel he had preached.

They had been bombarded by emissaries who insinuated that Paul was not a true Apostle, that he had broadened Christianity making it too easy by removing circumcision and the *Jewish Law*.

Now, in response, Paul reiterates the Master's teaching that the whole essence of the *Law and the Prophets* is found in the precept, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*.

As we saw in the **Parable of the Good Samaritan**, the **Law of Love** enlarges the concept of neighbor to include mankind.

Paul, having established his case that Christ has canceled any claim of the old dispensation on us, and having stressed that salvation is through faith and response to God, tells the Galatians in his letter, essentially, to stop their bickering, their nagging and snapping at one another, as this will prove their undoing.

Then, in the passage for today's Epistle, he acknowledges the tug of war between the flesh and the spirit; it is in the life fostered by the spirit where safety against the evils of the flesh may be found.

We have the flesh, being man's baser nature with all the evil lusts, not just the carnal or sensual but all the material and external things, the whole nature of man; and we have the spirit, being the higher power given to man by God, the life-giving force, the sanctifying Spirit of God.

The list of sins put forth by Paul can be grouped under four headings:

1. **sexual vices** which include fornication, moral impurity, and wantonness;
2. **vices associated with heathen worship** which include idolatry and sorcery;
3. **sins of factions**, such as enmity, wrangling, jealousy, passionate outbursts, self-seeking, dissensions, differences, and envying;
4. **sins of appetite**, which include drunken debauches and carousing.

Even the **Mosaic Law** condemns the sins of the flesh, and adherence to the Law is a preventive measure.

But, on the other hand, there is the fruit of the spirit, the Christian virtues, which are spontaneous, springing from the inner principle of life.

While the list of Christian virtues could also be grouped to correspond with the sins of the flesh, most significant is that by union with Christ, the flesh is crucified, so there are no sexual vices and, by embracing the **Law of Love** and possessing the Spirit of God in our hearts, our outward actions will be under his guidance.

Paul emphasizes there can be no condemnation of anyone who possesses these Christian virtues, as there is no law against them, the reference being to the **Mosaic Law**, fulfilled by the **Law of Love**.

To simply state it, what Paul is telling the Galatians is that the **Law**, the old dispensation, may prevent a person from committing those sins called *the works of the flesh*, but the **Law**, in and of itself, could not produce in us the *fruits of the Spirit*. The Law simply cannot deal with love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These are spiritual, reflecting the inward affections of the hearts and mind.

Thus, Paul indissolubly links wholesome ethical conduct with the Spirit of Christ.

Christ has freed us. Freed us to serve him, for, in him, service becomes perfect freedom. We acknowledge that so beautifully in the *Collect for Peace*, found in the **Daily Office of Morning Prayer**:

O GOD, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries.

Our obedience to God as Christians is not based on an external law; rather, it comes from within as a loving response.

What is required of us as Christians is far more demanding than the **Law of Moses**; it is a transformation that comes from within, it is a new way of life.

We have taken the first steps in the transformation process simply by being here today, that is, by joining together in the worship of God.

In discovering God's love for us, through prayer, we can begin to realize the virtues Paul has described in his Epistles.

It is through the working of the Holy Spirit within us that we will be converted, transformed, and the results may be seen in what we do and how we do it. More significantly, it will be reflected in what we become.

Christ has made us free; He has freed us from the bondage of sin by fulfilling the Law. In him and through him is our salvation. Through faith in Jesus Christ we will find the Peace of God which passeth all understanding.