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THE NATURE OF GOD IS REVEALED IN CHRIST

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily . . . (Col. 2:8-9).

The word "Godhead" occurs but three times in the New Testament Scriptures. It is found in Acts 17:29 where we are informed that,

Forasmuch then, as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

The nature of God transcends anything which man can create, either physically or philosophically. The letter to the Romans, however, reveals that God made known to us something of His nature by means of His own creation.

For the invisible things of him from creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

THE SCHOOLMASTER

The most clear and complete revelation of God, however, came in the person of Jesus Christ. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead in a body.

The human family cannot have a better view of Deity than we have in Jesus Christ. He is the most theologically accurate concept of God which man is capable of assimilating. He is, in fact, God manifest in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16).

Marco Polo was born in the year A.D. 1254, to a noble family in Venice. His father and his uncle were merchants to the East and journeyed to the court of Kublai Khan who was the grandson of Genhis Khan.

In 1271, 17 year old Marco Polo accompanied them to the Orient. It was 24 years before he returned to Italy.

When he did return and tried to relate the glories of what he had seen, he was regarded as the greatest liar in Europe.

The Europeans had never seen a coconut, or an alligator, a reindeer or a polar bear. They had no concept of a postal system or paper money. The scientific advancement of the East was so far beyond the European mentality of the time that virtually no one believed what Marco Polo had to say.

As a matter of fact, on his deathbed a priest was begging him to recant these stories and ask God for forgiveness.

Polo responded that he had not told them the half of what he had seen.

Jesus faced a similar problem. He said,

Ye are from beneath; I am from above, ye are of this world; I am not of this world (John 8:23).

When Jesus tried to explain the new birth to Nicodemus, the message was more than he was able to comprehend. Jesus then said,

If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things (John 3:12)?

The crucifixion of Jesus is a monument to ignorance! Jesus was not only God, He was also the "Word" of God (John 1:1). A word is a vehicle of communication. Therefore, Jesus was the vehicle by which God communicated His nature to man. God not only reveals to us His nature on the pages of Holy Scripture, but also in the person of Jesus Christ.

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Just as God's revelation in the Scripture transcended law, so also the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ also transcends law.

We see this first of all in the realm of physical law. Jesus was born of a virgin—contrary to physical law. He turned the water into wine, He multiplied the loaves and fish, He healed the sick, He raised the dead, He walked upon the water. All of these "miracles" transcended the "laws" of the physical world.

But it is also true that the life of Jesus transcended the laws of man and also the Law of Moses. It is not just that Jesus correctly interpreted the Law of Moses, it is that He operated outside the realm of its jurisdiction.

As astronaut in orbit does not have to worry about stop signs and speed limits. He operates at a totally different level.

So Jesus operated outside the realm of the law's jurisdiction.

Tribute Money

Once Peter was asked if his master paid the tribute money. Peter said "yes." Jesus, however, didn't have to do so at all. He said to Peter,

What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children or of strangers?

Peter correctly responded - "of strangers."

Jesus then observed that the children were exempt from tribute. Jesus, however, elected to pay the tribute with a coin that was miraculously obtained. This He did, not because he HAD to, but because He WANTED to (Matt. 17:24-27).

Jesus was never coerced by outward pressure. His life instead was governed by His divine nature.

The Temple

The first major act of our Lord's public ministry was to enter into the Temple in Jerusalem at Passover time and to disrupt what was going on. He found those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money, and when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables (John 2:13-16).

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It is clear that Jesus did what He wanted to in the Temple—but remember that He was God and, therefore, only wanted to do that which was right!

Worship

The Hebrew people were forbidden by law to worship God at any place except where He had chosen to put His name. (See Deut. 12:5.)

When God chose to put His name in Jerusalem, Jewish people had to journey there from all over the world in order to worship.

The book of Acts confirms this truth by observing,

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5).

In the following verses a great number of different nationalities were then listed.

Transcending what the law had to say, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well,

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father (John 4:21).

Again He said,

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

Again it is clear that Jesus had a concept of worship which transcended that which was revealed in the law.

Lepers

Lepers, according to law, were unclean. They were to be segregated from others in society and were to go about crying, "unclean, unclean" (Lev. 13:45).

Jesus, however, operated above the law and reached out and touched lepers, (see Matt. 8:2-4; Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12-14) and even went into the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany (Matt. 26:6ff.). From the human point of view this seemed "illegal."

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Once when Jesus entered into a village, He met ten lepers who stood afar off just like the law required. Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priest, just like the law required. And as they went they were cleansed.

Then one of these lepers who was cleansed did something which it seems to me was contrary to the law. He no longer stood afar off but came right into the presence of Jesus and fell down at His feet and gave thanks (Lk. 17:12-19).

By law the process by which a leper was admitted back into society was a lengthy and complicated one. It is recorded in Leviticus 13 and 14 and required many sacrifices and many days.

The man who returned to give thanks may not have been familiar with all of these technical details for he was a Samaritan. But he did possess something which enabled him to transcend the law—faith.

Jesus said to him, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole" (Lk. 17:19).

It seems that Jesus was trying to teach us something.

Issue of Blood

Leviticus 15:19-33 deals with the specific situation of a woman who had an issue of blood.

The woman, in such circumstances, was not only unclean, but everything and everybody who came in contact with her was also unclean. The uncleanness extended even to those who came in contact with something which she had sat upon or laid upon.

In Luke 8:43-48 we are told the story of a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years.

The crowd on this occasion was so great that the multitudes were "thronging" Jesus.

Contrary to the law, this woman was in the midst of that crowd, and unclean as she was, she dared to reach out and touch the border of the garment which Jesus was wearing.

Again, however, faith transcended law and the woman was cleansed. Jesus said it like this, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

Surely God was trying to teach us something.

Defilement of the Dead

Numbers 19:11-22 deals with defilement of the dead. It informs us that anyone who even touched a dead body would be unclean for seven days. Anyone who touched the dead and was not subsequently purified according to the Law of Moses was to be "cut off from Israel" (Nu. 19:13).

The defilement of the dead was so potent that it extended to anyone who even touched the grave of a dead person (Nu. 19:16, 18).

Furthermore, anyone or anything who contacted a defiled person also became unclean.

And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even (Nu. 19:22).

Jesus, however, was not intimidated by dead people. He reached out and took a dead girl by the hand (Lk. 9:54). He touched the bier upon which a dead man was lying (Lk. 7:14), and even felt free to command others to touch the grave of Lazarus (John 11:39).

These experiences transcended anything dealt with in the law because the moment these dead people came in contact with Jesus, they were no longer dead.

There was no legal precedent by which human beings could render an accurate judgment.

Surely God was trying to teach us something by all of this.

The Sabbath

Remembering the sabbath was a part of the Mosaic Law. In Deuteronomy 5:12-14, the Hebrew people were not only commanded to remember the sabbath themselves, they were also held responsible for making sure that nobody else violated the sabbath. No work was to be done by a son, a daughter, a manservant, a maidservant, an ox, an ass, or any cattle, not even by a stranger who happened to be living there.

Exodus 31:14 specifies that anyone who defiles the sabbath or does any work on the sabbath is to be put to death.

Numbers 15:35 provides us with an inspired example of a man who was put to death for gathering sticks on the sabbath day.

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Jesus, however, never allowed sabbath regulations to keep Him from doing anything which He wanted to do. Remember, however, that Jesus was God and only wanted to do things which were good.

Here is a list of some of the things which Jesus did on the sabbath:

He plucked grain and ate it - Matt. 12:1ff.; Mk. 2:23ff.; Lk. 6:1ff.

He healed a man with a withered hand - Matt. 12:10ff.; Mk. 3:2ff.; Lk. 6:6ff.

He entered the synagogue and taught - Mk. 1:21ff.; Lk. 4:16ff.

He cast out demons - Mk. 1:25-26

He ate bread and healed a man with dropsy - Lk. 4:1ff.

Perhaps even more serious from the legal perspective was the fact that Jesus commanded others to do things upon the sabbath day.

John 5:1ff. is a classic example. Upon this occasion Jesus went into the midst of a multitude of sick and impotent people—healed one of them, and then commanded him to rise, take up his bed and walk (John 5:8).

The Jews responded by doing exactly what the law commanded them to do, they went about to kill Jesus (see Ex. 31:14 and John 5:16).

Later Jesus healed a man born blind by making a mixture of spittle and dirt and placing this upon the blind man's eyes. Then, even though it was the sabbath day, He commanded that man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

Such commandments by Jesus were obviously calculated to challenge the law of the sabbath.

What David Did

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus with accusations of sabbath violations, Jesus reminded them of what David did.

David did that which it was not lawful for him to do!

There is no way around this obvious truth of Scripture. This fact is specifically mentioned three different times in the Gospels (Matt. 12:4; Mk. 2:26; Lk. 6:4). David did that which it was not lawful for him to do.

This boggles the mind of those who see law as greater than God. It is not a problem, however, when we see the law in its proper perspective.

The example of David is so significant that we will later devote an entire chapter to it.

Gentiles

When the Lord gave Israel His covenant of law He set them apart as a separate and peculiar people. He did not make this covenant with their fathers (Deut. 5:2-3) nor with any other nation on earth.

With reference to the Israelites Paul said that to them “. . . pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises . . .” (Rom. 9:4).

In a number of places God commanded Israel to be a separate people. Deuteronomy 7:1ff. is a good example. They were to destroy the seven nations that inhabited Canaan and were specifically forbidden to show them mercy, or make a covenant with them, or to intermarry with them.

Jesus, however, specifically showed mercy to a woman of Canaan. He did so upon the basis of her faith.

The story is recorded for us in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 and interestingly enough comes just after Jesus had been rejected by the multitudes of Israel.

Jesus came into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon and a “woman of Canaan” came to Him and said, “Have mercy on me, O Lord” (Matt. 15:22).

Again may I remind you that mercy to such a person was specifically forbidden in Deuteronomy 7:2, “thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them.”

Yet Jesus did have mercy upon her saying,

O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour (Matt. 15:28).

It is obvious that Jesus was looking for “faith” more than for a fleshly relationship with Abraham.

John the Baptist told his listeners that God was able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt. 3:9). Perhaps, as we have said before, he beckoned with his hand to gentile country when he made that statement.

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When Jesus delivered a sermon to His home town in Nazareth, He reminded them that there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah the prophet, yet Elijah was sent to a gentile widow in the city of Sidon.

He also pointed out that there were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet, but none was cleansed save Naaman the Syrian.

Then the people in the synagogue rose up and sought to cast Jesus headlong over the brow of a hill (Lk. 4:29).

When Jesus healed the Centurion's servant, He said, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, NOT IN ISRAEL" (Matt. 8:10).

The message of Jesus transcended the message of the law. The message of Jesus was not just for Jews, it was for "whosoever."

"Whosoever" can believe and be saved (John 3:16; 11:26; 12:46; etc.). Peter was a long time grasping this truth, but after much teaching and several miracles, he finally acknowledged this to the household of Cornelius. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

Again you can see a dramatic distinction between the way the law spoke about gentiles and the way that Jesus treated them.

Surely God was trying to teach us something.

Woman Taken In Adultery

Though this story is wanting in some manuscripts, it provides us with a clear contrast between the law and Jesus.

The law was crystal clear that a woman caught in the act of adultery should be put to death (Lev. 20:11; Deut. 22:22, etc.). The Jews knew this and brought such a woman to Jesus for His verdict.

Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. He then invited any who was without sin to cast the first stone, and again He stooped down and wrote upon the ground.

The woman's accusers began to leave, beginning with the eldest, and presently no one was left but the woman.

The law condemned her, but Jesus did not.

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“Neither do I condemn thee” said Jesus, “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Surely that ought to teach us something.

The Cross

There are, of course, many other aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus which challenge the law as a basis for living.

Jesus, however, did more than merely challenge the law, He triumphed over it.

The book of Colossians puts it like this,

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly triumphing over them in it (Col. 2:14-15).

Perhaps no greater frontal assault was made on the law than that which Jesus made by means of His death.

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. Him who knew no sin God made to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

I suppose there are an almost inexhaustible number of ways to die, but Jesus died in a way which specifically made Him accursed by law.

“He that is hanged is accursed of God” (Deut. 21:23).

Yet, Jesus still triumphed . . . surely this ought to teach us something.

Remember that the law was only a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Did Jesus operate under the law or above the law?
2. Was the attitude of Jesus toward law an example for us?
3. Is it possible to really know someone without personal experience with them?
4. Can we personally experience God through words?
5. Which is more important, the letter of the law or the spirit of the law?

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6. Why didn't Jesus condemn the woman who violated the law by being in a crowd while having an issue of blood?
7. If the purpose of the law was to prepare men for Jesus, why didn't the students of the law receive Jesus?
8. Does faith operate under law or above law?
9. Does one have to understand faith in order to use it?
10. If God did not expect men to live under law, why did He give it?

