

THESE sections teach the following propositions:

1. That God, as the supreme moral Governor of the universe, introduced the human race into existence as an order of moral creatures, under inalienable and perpetual subjection to an all-perfect moral law, which in all the elements thereof binds man's conscience and requires perfect obedience.

2. That God, as the Guardian of the human race, entered into a special covenant with Adam, as the natural head of the race, constituting him also the federal head of all mankind, and requiring from him, during a period of probation, perfect obedience to the law above named, promising to him and to his descendants in him confirmation in holiness and eternal felicity as the reward of obedience, and threatening both his wrath and curse as the punishment of disobedience.

3. This law after the fall, and the introduction of the dispensation of salvation through the Messiah, while it ceased to offer be the revealed expression of God's will, binding all human consciences as the rule of life.

4. That this moral law has for our instruction been summarily comprehended, as to its general principles, in their application to the main relations men sustain to God and to each other, in the Ten Commandments, "which were delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai, and written by him in two tables of stone; and are recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus. The first four commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to man." L. Cat., q. 98.

1. God introduced man at his creation as a moral agent, under inalienable and perpetual subjection to an all-perfect moral law, which binds his conscience and requires perfect obedience. This follows self-evidently and necessarily from the very nature of God as a moral Governor, and from the nature of man as a moral agent.

Of this law we remark —

(1.) That it has its ground in the all-perfect and unchangeable moral nature of God. When we affirm that God is holy, we do not mean that he makes right to be right by simply willing it, but that he wills it because it is right. There must therefore be some absolute standard of righteousness. This absolute standard of righteousness is the divine nature. The infallible judge of righteousness is the divine intelligence. The all-perfect executor and rule of righteousness among the creatures is the divine will. The form of our duties springs from our various relations to God and to man; but the invariable principle upon which all duty is grounded, and which gives it its binding moral obligation, is rooted in the changeless nature of God, of which his will is the outward expression. All the divine laws belong to one or other of four classes. They are either—

(a.) Such as are grounded directly in the perfections of the divine nature, and are hence absolutely immutable and irrevocable even by God himself. These are such as the duty of love and obedience to God, and of love and truth in our relations to our fellow-creatures. Or,

(b.) Such as have their immediate ground in the permanent nature and relations of men; as, for instance, the laws which protect the rights of property and regulate the relation of the sexes. These continue unchanged as long as the present constitution of nature continues, and are of universal binding obligation, alike because of their natural propriety as because of the will of God by which they are enforced; although God, who is the author of nature, may in special instances waive the application of the law at his pleasure, as he did in the case of polygamy among the ancient Jews. Or,—

(c.) Such as have their immediate ground in the changing relations of individuals and communities. Of this class are the great mass of the civil and judicial laws of the ancient Jews, which express the will of God for them in their peculiar circumstances, and which of course are intended to be binding only so long as the special conditions to which they are

appropriate exist. Or,—

(*d.*) Such as depend altogether for their binding obligation upon the positive command of God, which are neither universal nor perpetual, but bind those persons only to whom God has addressed them, and only so long as the positive enactment endures. This class includes all rites and ceremonies, etc.

(2.) We remark in the second place that this moral law, at least in its essential principles, and as far as was necessary for the guidance of men in a state of innocency, was revealed in the very constitution of man's nature; and although it has been greatly obscured by sin, it remains sufficiently clear to render even the heathen without excuse. This is certain — (*a.*) Because it is asserted and argued by Paul (Rom. i. 19, 20; ii. 14, 15); (*b.*) From the fact that all heathen do possess and act upon such an innate sense of right and of moral accountability, although they may in various degrees be ignorant of specific moral duties. This moral law written upon the heart was part of Adam's original endowment when he was created, as we saw under chapter iv., § 2.

(3.) We remark that the revelation of this moral law of God made in the human constitution, however sufficient it may have been for the guidance of man before he fell, in the natural relations he sustained to his Creator, is under his present circumstances altogether insufficient, as we saw under chapter i., § 1. Hence God has been pleased to make a more full and explicit revelation of his law to man in the inspired Scriptures taken as a whole, which is the only and the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice, as we saw under chapter i.

(4.) We remark in the fourth place that the Scriptures being the *only* and a *complete* rule of faith and practice, whatever is revealed therein as the will of God is part of the moral law for Christian men; and whatever is not revealed therein as his will, either directly or by necessary implication, is no part of our moral obligation at all. See chapter xvi., §§ 1 and 2.

2. That God introduced Adam, as the head and representative of the whole human family, at his creation, into a covenant relation to the law, making perfect obedience to it for a probationary period the condition of his character and destiny for ever, we have already discussed, chapter vii., §§ 1 and 2. After the fall of Adam, both he and all his race became incapable of satisfying that covenant themselves, and it pleased God to send forth his Son, made under the law, being born of a woman, to fulfil as the second Adam all the requirements of the legal covenant in behalf of his elect, and to secure for them all its benefits, as we saw under chapter viii.

3. While the law in its relation of a covenant of works has been fulfilled by our Surety, so that they who are under grace are no more under the law in that capacity (Rom. vi. 14), nevertheless the law as a rule of action and standard of character is immutable, unrelaxable, and inalienable, in its personal relations. Christ fulfilled the law for us vicariously as the condition of salvation, and on that basis we are justified. But no one can be vicariously conformed to the law for us as a rule of conduct or of moral character. Therefore, while Christ fulfilled the law *for* us, the Holy Spirit fulfils the law *in* us, by sanctifying us into complete conformity to it. And in obedience to this law the believer brings forth those good works which are the fruits though not the ground of our salvation.

4. That this moral law has been summarily comprehended in the two tables of the law, called the Ten Commandments, is a fact not disputed. By this it is not meant that every duty which God now requires of Christian men may be directly derived from the Decalogue, but that the general principles of the infinite law of moral perfection, as adjusted to the general relations sustained by men to God and to one another, may be found there. This is certain, because —

(1.) The two tables of the law were placed under the mercy-seat, which was God's throne, and were called the testimonies of God against the sins of the people; and over them, upon the "covering" or mercy-seat, the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sin-offering. Deut. x.

1-5; Ex. xxx. 6; xxxi. 18; Lev. xvi. 14, 15. They therefore represented that all-perfect law of righteousness which is the foundation of God's throne, and which is the testimony of God against human sin, and which is propitiated by the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

(2.) The Ten Commandments teach love to God and to man; and on these, the Saviour said, hang all the Law and the Prophets. Matt. xxii. 37-40.

(3.) Christ said, that if a man keep this law he shall live. Luke x. 25-28.

(4.) Every specific duty taught in any portion of the Scriptures may more or less directly be referred to one or other of the general precepts taught in the Decalogue.

These commandments were originally written by the finger of God himself on two tables of stone. The first four relate to the duties man owes to God, and the remaining six relate to the duties we owe to our fellow-men. The Romish Church assigns only three commandments to the first table, and seven to the second. She unites the first and second commandments together, in order to make it appear that only the worship of false gods and images of them is forbidden, while the images of the true God and of saints are not excluded from the instruments of worship; and, in order to keep up the number, she divides the tenth into two—making the first clause the ninth commandment, and the remaining clauses the tenth.

The great rule for interpreting the Decalogue is to keep constantly in mind that it is the law of God, and not the law of man — that it respects and requires the conformity of the governing affections and dispositions of the heart as well as of the outward actions. Every commandment involves a general moral principle, applicable to a wide variety of particular conditions, respecting the motives and ends of action, as well as action itself. The rules of interpretation laid down in the L. Cat., q. 99, are in substance as follows:—

(1.) The law is perfect, requiring perfect obedience, and condemning the least shortcoming as sin.

(2.) It is spiritual, respecting thoughts, feelings, motives, and inward states of hearts, as well as actions.

(3.) That every command implies a corresponding prohibition, and every prohibition a corresponding command; and every promise a corresponding threatening, and every threatening a corresponding promise.

(4.) That under one sin or duty all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded, together with all that, directly or indirectly, are the causes or occasions of them.

(5.) That we are not only bound to fulfil the law ourselves, but also to help others to do so as far as we can.