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The Law-A Mouth-Stopper

By the late: C. D. Cole

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:19-24).

A lot of things happens to a person in conversion—in that experience in passing from death unto life—in becoming a child of God—in being saved. His opinions undergo a change—his religious ideas are entirely revolutionized. He believes what he never thought he could believe. His affections undergo a change—he loves what he once hated and hates what he once loved—he even loves people he thought he could never love. In conversion, a man quits bragging on himself and begins to glory in Christ and His cross. His mouth is stopped from boasting and is set to praising God.

Our text speaks of the law of God as a mouth-stopper. Nobody likes to have his mouth stopped. Our natural wish is to say what we want to say.

Interruptions and restrictions are often keenly resented. As Americans, we boast of liberty of speech. One of our most prized liberties is freedom of speech. We are free to express our views on politics and religion without fear. But most people of this world do not have this liberty. Where dictators rule, mouths are not open to say what men would like to say.

In human courts, a shut mouth means condemnation and punishment. Most of us have had some experience in the court room either as a witness or spectator, and some have been in court as defendants. We have seen prisoners at the bar with nothing to say when the trial judge asked if they could give any reason why sentence should not be pronounced. A shut mouth would mean that all resources had been exhausted—that nothing more could be said in self-defense.

Some years ago, I was a witness in a murder case. The accused man was a member of a rather well-to-do family, and the case was fiercely fought. For days the defendant pleaded in his own defense, even when his guilt was obvious. The jury returned with a verdict of guilty. And when the convicted man was asked to give any reason why sentence should not be imposed, he made no reply—his mouth was shut. And this was the result of the operation of human law.

Now, let us think about another court—the court of God. Every man must sooner or later stand before God to render an account of himself. The Creator is also the Judge of all the earth.

In the heavenly court, every mouth will be stopped. But every mouth will not be stopped at the same time. The mouths of some will be stopped here in confession of sin, and the mouths of others will not be stopped until the day of judgment. The saved have their mouths stopped here; the lost will have their mouths stopped in judgment. In the parable of the marriage feast, Jesus tells of a man who came to the feast without being properly dressed for such an occasion—he had not put on the wedding garment. And the King who was giving the feast in honour of his son said to the man, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" And the man was speechless. Matt. 22:12. This wedding garment stands for the robe of Christ's imputed righteousness which one puts on by faith in the redemptive death of Christ. Men may argue and give excuses now for not trusting Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, but in the day of judgment, their mouths will be shut—they will be speechless.

Here is the dividing line between the saved and the lost. The saved man has stopped boasting of his good works. He has reached the end of his resources, and has nothing to plead for salvation except the blood of Christ. He can say with the poet: "I am only a sinner and nothing at all, but Christ is my all and in all." And with another poet: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." But the lost man does not trust in Christ. If he has any concern for his soul and any hope of heaven, it is in what he has done or expects to do. The only righteousness he knows anything about is self-righteousness, the very thing the Bible calls filthy rags. The Lord tells us that there will be people—many of them—going to the judgment still boasting. He says, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and cast out demons, and done many wonderful works?" only to hear Him say, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22,23).

If I may be a bit personal, I want to describe another court scene when I myself was the defendant at the bar. It was a long and hard fought case extending over a period of several years. God was the Judge, the Holy Spirit was the prosecutor, and my own conscience was the defending attorney. I made many defense pleas only to have every one of them torn to shreds. I first pleaded for justice. I reasoned that a just God would not send me to hell. I see now how silly this argument was. I next pleaded mercy. I felt a merciful God wouldn't send me to hell. You may say that should have been effective. But my trouble was that I pleaded mercy without trusting the Saviour mercy had provided. There is mercy with God, but this mercy is in Jesus Christ, and the sinner must

come to Jesus Christ Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation or mercy seat through faith in His blood. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom.3:25). The true mercy-seat is a person, even Jesus Christ; not a bench or any other material object or geographical place on this earth. But back in the story of my conversion. After pleading for mercy without relief, I then pleaded my own righteousness. I pointed to my moral life, and introduced character witnesses who testified to my morals. I even brought in a preacher who flattered me by saying that I was better than most people in the church, as he urged me to be baptized and get into the church. But the Holy Spirit would not let me get away from the law which required supreme love to God and my neighbor as myself. My mouth was finally stopped, and I pleaded guilty—my self-defense was ended, and I was in despair. The sentence of death was passed upon me and all hope was gone. And then, a blessed thing happened. My eyes were opened to see that Jesus Christ was the Saviour, and that He had put away my sins by the sacrifice of Himself. I had found a plea that would prevail with God—"my only plea, Christ died for me." My experience of joy was like that of the Psalmist when he said, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (Ps. 40:2,3). And so the prosecutor, the Holy Spirit, was my friend after all. He wanted to show me Jesus Christ, but I could not see Him as Saviour until I was convicted that I was lost on my own record and had no plea that would satisfy the God of justice. This is essential in salvation. One must plead something that will satisfy the claims of Divine justice. And this is nothing but the blood of Christ. "Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me." Paul says, "being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9).

Now, let us consider Paul's conversion. The law stopped his mouth so that what he says in our text was experienced in his own case. And in Rom. 7:9, he says, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." He was alive without the law, that is, he thought he was all right—he was sure of salvation—but it was because he did not have the law. He had the law before him in the writings of Moses, but he did not have the meaning of it in his heart. But in his conversion, the commandment came—the tenth

commandment, which says, "Thou shalt not covet," reached his heart, and he saw that he was not alive but dead in trespasses and sins. When he saw what the law demanded; that it even forbade evil desires, he says the very demands of the law wrought in him all manner of concupiscence; that is, when the law said, "Thou shalt not covet," the sin that was in him aroused and stimulated all kinds of evil desires. It is the function of the law to reveal the fact of sin and to show the need of salvation. In Romans 3:20 Paul says, "For by the law is the knowledge of sin." The law is a plumbline to show us our moral crookedness, but it cannot make us straight. The law is a mirror to show us our moral filth, but it cannot be used as a wash basin in making us clean.

In Phil. 3 Paul says that he had given up hope in all the things he once trusted and regarded them as of no more value than "dung"; not having his own righteousness which was by the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Paul had an experience in which he was completely and forever cured of his self-righteousness. In I Tim. 1:15 he says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." I usually agree with Paul, but I can't go along with him here. It seems to me that I am the chief of sinners. And I wonder if this is not the attitude of every saved person. Each of us knows more about his own heart and life; about his own sinful thoughts and secret sins, than that of others. I am the biggest sinner I know, because I am the only sinner I know.

As a sinner with a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, let me say to sinners who have no Saviour,

"Come to the Saviour now! He gently calleth thee;
In true repentance bow, Before Him bend the kneel
He waiteth to bestow salvation, peace, and love,
True joy on earth below, A home in heaven above.
Come, come, come.

"Come to the Saviour now! He suffered all for thee;
And in His merits thou Hast an unfailling plea;
No vain excuses frame, For feelings do not stay;
None who to Jesus came Was ever sent away.
Come, come, come.

And may the Holy Spirit cause you to comel



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