

XVI. — Perfect Righteousness Was Conferred Neither by Circumcision nor by Any Other Legal Ceremonies. The Decalogue, However, Was Not Cancelled by Christ, but Is Always in Force: Men Were Never Released from Its Commandments.

1. Moreover, we learn from the Scripture itself, that God gave circumcision, not as the completer of righteousness, but as a sign, that the race of Abraham might continue recognisable. For it declares: "God said unto Abraham, every male among you shall be circumcised; and ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, as a token of the covenant between Me and you." (Gen_7:9-11) This same does Ezekiel the prophet say with regard to the Sabbaths: "Also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord, that sanctify them." (Eze_20:12) And in Exodus, God says to Moses: "And ye shall observe My Sabbaths; for it shall be a sign between Me and you for your generations." (Exo_21:13) **These things, then, were given for a sign; but the signs were not unsymbolic, that is, neither unmeaning nor to no purpose, inasmuch as they were given by a wise Artist; but the circumcision after the flesh typified that after the Spirit.** For "we," says the apostle, "have been circumcised with the circumcision made without hands." (Col_2:11) And the prophet declares, "Circumcise the hardness of your heart." (Deu_10:16, LXX. version) But the Sabbaths taught that we should continue day by day in God's service. "For we have been counted," says the Apostle Paul, "all the day long as sheep for the slaughter;" (Rom_8:36) **that is, consecrated [to God], and ministering continually to our faith, and persevering in it, and abstaining from all avarice, and not acquiring or possessing treasures upon earth. (Mat_6:19)** Moreover, the Sabbath of God (*requietio Dei*), that is, the kingdom, was, as it were, indicated by created things; in which [kingdom], the man who shall have persevered in serving God (*Deo assistere*) shall, in a state of rest, partake of God's table.

2. And that man was not justified by these things, but that they were given as a sign to the people, this fact shows, — **that Abraham himself, without circumcision and without observance of Sabbaths, "believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God." (Jas_2:23)** Then, again, Lot, without circumcision, was brought out from Sodom, receiving salvation from God. So also did Noah, pleasing God, although he was uncircumcised, receive the dimensions [of the ark], of the world of the second race [of men]. Enoch, too, pleasing God, without circumcision, discharged the office of God's legate to the angels although he was a man, and was translated, and is preserved until now as a witness of the just judgment of God, because the angels when they had transgressed fell to the earth for judgment, but the man who pleased [God] was translated for salvation. Moreover, all the rest of the multitude of those righteous men who lived before Abraham, and of **those patriarchs who preceded Moses**, were justified independently of the things above mentioned, and **without the law of Moses**. As also Moses himself says to the people in Deuteronomy: "The Lord thy God formed a covenant in Horeb. The Lord formed not this covenant with your fathers, but for you." (Deu_5:2)

3. Why, then, did the Lord not form the covenant for the fathers? Because **"the law was not established for righteous men." (1Ti_1:9)** But the righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls, that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbour. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates (*correptoriis literis*), because they had the righteousness of the law in themselves. But when this righteousness and love to God had passed into oblivion, and became extinct in Egypt, **God did necessarily, because of His great goodwill to men, reveal Himself by a**

voice, and led the people with power out of Egypt, in order that man might again become the disciple and follower of God; and He afflicted those who were disobedient, that they should not contemn their Creator; and He fed them with manna, that they might receive food for their souls (*uti rationalem acciperent escam*); as also Moses says in Deuteronomy: "And fed thee with manna, which thy fathers did not know, that thou might know that man doth not live by bread alone; but by every word of God proceeding out of His mouth doth man live." (Deu_8:3) And it enjoined love to God, and taught just dealing towards our neighbour, that we should neither be unjust nor unworthy of God, who prepares man for His friendship through the medium of the Decalogue, and likewise for agreement with his neighbour, – matters which did certainly profit man himself; God, however, standing in no need of anything from man.

4. And therefore does the Scripture say, "These words the Lord spoke to all the assembly of the children of Israel in the mount, and He added no more;" (Deu_5:22) for, as I have already observed, He stood in need of nothing from them. And again, Moses says: "And now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?" (Deu_10:12) Now these things did indeed make man glorious, by supplying what was wanting to him, namely, the friendship of God; but they profited God nothing, for God did not at all stand in need of man's love. For the glory of God was wanting to man, which he could obtain in no other way than by serving God. And therefore Moses says to them again: "Choose life, that thou mayest live, and thy seed, to love the Lord thy God, to hear His voice, to cleave unto Him; for this is thy life, and the length of thy days." (Deu_30:19, Deu_30:20) Preparing man for this life, the Lord Himself did speak in His own person to all alike the words of the Decalogue; and therefore, in like manner, do they remain permanently with us, receiving by means of His advent in the flesh, extension and increase, but not abrogation.

5. The laws of bondage, however, were one by one promulgated to the people by Moses, suited for their instruction or for their punishment, as Moses himself declared: "And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments." (Deu_4:14) These things, therefore, which were given for bondage, and for a sign to them, He cancelled by the new covenant of liberty. But He has increased and widened those laws which are natural, and noble, and common to all, granting to men largely and without grudging, by means of adoption, to know God the Father, and to love Him with the whole heart, and to follow His word unswervingly, while they abstain not only from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. But He has also increased the feeling of reverence; for sons should have more veneration than slaves, and greater love for their father. And therefore the Lord says, "As to every idle word that men have spoken, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment." (Mat_12:36) And, "he who has looked upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart;" (Mat_5:28) and, "he that is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." (Mat_5:22) [All this is declared,] that we may know that we shall give account to God not of deeds only, as slaves, but even of words and thoughts, as those who have truly received the power of liberty, in which [condition] a man is more severely tested, whether he will reverence, and fear, and love the Lord. And for this reason Peter says "that we have not liberty as a cloak of maliciousness," (1Pe_2:16) but as the means of testing and evidencing faith. ~Irenaeus- Against Heresies Book IV Vol. 1 "Commandments"