

THE RULE AND
THE RIDDLE.

WILLIAM HUNTINGTON

The Rule and The Riddle

By WILLIAM HUNTINGTON

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I received my sister's kind epistle, and have considered her numberless complaints, and the difficulty of her way. "That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered" says Solomon. Every epistle comes with heavy tidings; and no wonder, for thou art compassing about the old mount, and hast got the veil on again and thou wilt hold it fast enough, unless some evangelical watchman, or keeper of the walls, be sent to smite thee, wound thee, and take away thy veil from thee, Song v. 7. Thy poor husband must have need of patience now to bear with thee, for thy temper will try him to purpose. There is no living at peace where Hagar keeps house. Let the bondwoman once get between thee and the everlasting Father, and she will soon make you feel the difference between the yoke of a bondmistress and the freedom of a married wife. Hagar will soon bear rule, entangle thee in the yoke of servile fear, and provoke thee to jealousy, till thy flesh be ready to crawl upon thy bones; and thou wilt become a burden to thyself, and to all about thee. And then it is well if thou dost not say, My wrong be upon thee. It is thy own foolishness that perverteth thy way, and thy heart fretteth against the Lord, Prov. xix. 3.

Truth has told thee that Hagar is mount Sinai in the figure, and genders to bondage. But if the Lamb's wife set no more store by her dignity and honour than to commit the management of her affairs to a bondservant, it is a pity but she should bear the yoke till she knows the worth of her liberty, honour, and privileges. Hagar was appointed to serve, not to bear rule. There are three things that disquiet the earth, yea four that it cannot bear; and the first is, "For a servant when he reigneth." Thou art not to serve in the oldness of the letter. Therefore, cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the bondwoman must not govern the Lamb's wife, nor shall the bondchild be heir with the children of promise. This thing will not be grievous to the Father of the faithful concerning the bondwoman and her son, for he has told thee that the servant abideth not in the house forever; but the son abideth ever. And those sons are free sons, who are delivered from the yoke of bondage, and stand fast in their, liberty. And the free woman is one who cleaves to her royal husband, manages her house with discretion, and keeps her servants in their place.

Thou hadst not got this yoke on thy neck, nor this grave-cloth wrapped about thy head, when thou satest under what is now called Antinomianism: thy soul seemed then to be healthy, thy conversation savoury, and thy countenance comely; thy heart was like the chariots of Amminadib, and thou didst run the race set before thee with delight. But where art thou now? They have driven thee with the law till thou art both blind and bound. "They zealously affect you, but not well;" they that lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy path; thou art not now in Wisdom's pleasant ways, nor in the paths of peace.

Remember from whence thou art fallen; from thy first love, from heartfelt union and fellowship with Christ, from joy and peace in believing, and from the happy enjoyment of God's

free Spirit! Thou didst then enjoy the liberty of the gospel; now thou feelest the bondage of the law. The Lord did attend the word with a marvellous power, and ministered the Spirit among you by the preaching of faith. Does he then same now by the works of the law? I trow not. Thou hast felt the Saviour's yoke to be easy, and his burden light; and thou never wast more holy nor happy within, nor more circumspect without, than thou wast then. I would have thee try and see what the law can do for thee: stick to it, and try what love, life, peace, and holiness, can be fetched from thence; and, when thou hast perfected the work of sanctification by that rule, then be so kind as to send me an exact account of it; explain the operations of it, thy sensations under it, and a true account of the superabounding practical holiness that thy family, fellowmembers, and neighbours, see in thee.

Not one holy motion, not one divine and pleasing sensation, not a single flame of pure love to God or man, wilt thou ever fetch from that covenant. "The law worketh wrath;" and the carnal mind is enmity against the lawgiver; nor can it be subject to the law. Those that are under it may cleave to one another, but the union is only the bond of natural affections; and some are held together by corrupt affections, and some given up to vile affections. But pure love flows freely from a reconciled God in Christ Jesus; and is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, who is the spirit of life and of a sound mind.

Thou canst not discern one from the other. No; for Paul says the preacher knows not what he says, nor whereof he affirms; and, if so, the flock, and thyself among them, must be tossed to and fro with a tempest; and not comforted; nor will be, until God appears to lay their stones with fair colours; and, as soon as the elect Foundation, chief Corner Stone, Stone of Help, and the Living Stone appears with divine lustre, thou wilt quit the storm, and be glad to embrace the shadow of that Rock in

this weary land. If thou aim at holiness by the law, remember thou must be perfect in the flesh as well as in spirit. The law is perfect; it will allow of no infirmities, no evil thoughts, no adulterous looks, no anger nor evil tempers, no fire to be kindled on the Sabbath day; not speaking thy own words, nor thinking thy own thoughts on that day; thy neighbor must be loved as thyself; half thy goods must be given to the poor; one coat of the two must go to them that have none; and then there is no getting to heaven but by taking up the cross, and following Jesus. No man shall ever stand the test of that law without a pure love to God, divine life in Christ, holiness by the Spirit, and an everlasting righteousness from the God of his salvation. When you come to London again we will compare notes together, and see which has gained most by trading; until which time pursue your present path, and I will pursue mine.

Make the law your only rule of life; read it, keep you eyes upon it, and live by it; and I will pray that I may be kept dead to the law, and alive unto God; that I may be crucified with Christ, and yet live; yet not I, but that Christ may live in me. If you make the law your rule of life, you are alive to the law, and walk in the law. And, if Christ lives in me, I shall be kept alive unto God, and walk in newness of life.

Go you on with the commandments, and I will go on with the promises. Make the law your rule of walk, and I will pray God to perform his promise in me, for God hath said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." Thus you go on by the law, and I by the gospel. Do you perform your duty, and I will plead my privileges. Act thou as an industrious servant; and, by God's grace, I will act as an affectionate son. Be thou obedient to the law, and I will pray for grace for obedience to the faith. Live thou in the fear of thy master, and I will endeavour to honour my heavenly Father.

Make the law thy only rule of action, and act accordingly; and I will depend upon God to work in me both to will and to do of his own good pleasure; yea, to fulfill all the good pleasure of his will in me, and the work of faith with power.

Make the law your only rule of conversation. Speak of the commandments "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates; that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children; in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them as the days of heaven upon the earth," And I will pray God to create the fruit of my lips; to give me a mouth and wisdom that all my enemies shall not be able to gainsay or resist; and that it may not be me that speaks, but that the Spirit of my heavenly Father may speak in me; and then my conversation will be with power, and my words seasoned with salt, ministering grace. Thus runs the promise, and the excellency and the power is of God; and, if God perform his promise to me He will have all the glory; and, if thou perform thy task, thou hast whereof to glory, but not before God, whatever thou dost before men.

Let the ministers of the letter bind all the grievous burdens upon your shoulders that you can possibly bear, and I will cast my burdens on the Lord who has promised to sustain me. Be thou careful to observe all the grievousness which they prescribe, and I will cast all my care upon him that careth for me. Walk thou by sight, and I by faith; walk thou in the letter, and I in the Spirit. Look thou to the commandments, and I will look to Jesus.

They that say this doctrine opens a door to all licentiousness know not what they say. You saw nothing like that in me; and those that are setting the law perpetually before your eyes,

and enforcing holiness from that, in order to blind your mind, and prejudice your soul, against the truth and the preachers of it, give you no other proof of their superior holiness than what you hear from their mouth. There is no more power in their discourses, no more savour in their conversations, no more knowledge in the word, no more experience of grace, no more success in their ministry, no more liberality, no more prevalency with God in prayer, no more circumspection before men, nor conscientiousness towards God, than appears in some that are called Antinomians; nor half so much. Men who have nothing to recommend them either in heart or life, must do all by the sound of a trumpet. he that laboured more abundantly than they all, and much more to the purpose, said, "It is not I, but the grace of God that was with me." But we have some in our days who tell us they fetch all their comfort from their holiness, and their holiness from the law: and I believe them; for they seem to have no fellowship with the God of comfort, nor experience of the Holy Ghost. Cleave thou to the Saviour, and depend on his grace; and, when these fail, then try the law. The way to Sinai is broader than the way to Zion; the path is the most beaten, and there are the greatest number of travellers. It is easier to get law than gospel; and a throne of judgment is more accessible than a throne of grace.

We have legions of unconverted preachers of the letter, but ministers of the Spirit are few. Most men will proclaim their own goodness, but a faithful man who can find? Men who are unacquainted with the power of godliness must enforce the letter, for that is all their stock. With the letter, a great noise, and a fair shew in the flesh, they deceive the simple. The mystery of faith is a puzzling thing to an unexperienced heart and an unenlightened head: when they attempt this they only betray their ignorance. The gentleman was right; "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and, if he has no holiness but what he gets from the law, he will never see the

Lord with acceptance; for "Except a man be born again (of the Holy Ghost) he cannot see (much less enter into) the kingdom of God." This kingdom of God is in power: regeneration enlightened us into it, and gives us a sensible enjoyment of it; for it stands in righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost; nothing of which comes to us from the law.

If enforcing the law as the only rule of life, and setting it before thee as thy only standard of holiness, be accompanied with power; if it produce love to God and man; if it promote true holiness; if it refresh the new man, and clothe the soul with humility and self loathing; if it endear Christ, and strengthen faith; if it produce spiritual life and peace; if it enlighten the eyes, enlarge the heart, wean from the world, purify the soul, encourage diligence, and make God, in his ways and worship, the delight of thy soul, thou mayest well bear with them; for these things come from God, and do accompany salvation. But I know there is nothing of all this attends such preaching; and this letter of yours is a sufficient proof of it.

I have set before my sister the law and the gospel, commandments and promises, life and death, a blessing and a curse. If thou cleave to the letter of the law, and make that thy rule of life, walk, actions, and conversation; then thy obedience will be the obedience of the law, not of faith; they will be thy fruits, not the fruits of the Spirit. By the law you work, by the gospel God works in me. You produce fruit in obedience to the letter; in Christ is my fruit found. You work by the law, by the gospel God works all my works in me. By the law you must make a new heart, and a new spirit; by the gospel God creates me anew in Christ Jesus. By the law you must love God; by the gospel God's love is shed abroad in my heart. By the law you must wash you, and make you clean; by the gospel God cleanses me from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit. Thus God works by the gospel, and by the law you work: by the one self is denied, and Christ is all in all; by the

other, self is exalted, and you are all in all. One of these agents must give way: grace must be grace, and works no more works; or works must be all, and grace nothing at all.

"I do not frustrate the grace of God; for, if righteousness come by the law, Christ is dead in vain." And as righteousness did not come by the law, so neither did holiness, life, or sanctification come by the law. Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, life, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and he doth sanctify and cleanse his church, and present it without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. If this opens a door to all licentiousness, then it follows that man's dead works are true holiness; and all God's works, which are perfect, licentiousness. Will not this be bitterness in the end? God tells me that I am become dead to the law, am delivered from the law, and that I am not under the law. And what is all this death and deliverance for? That we might live in sin? Nay, we are become dead to the law, that we may live unto God; we are delivered from it, that we may serve God in newness of the Spirit; and we are brought from under it that we might be under grace. But why living unto God, serving in the Spirit, and being under grace, should be called a door to all licentiousness, I know not: I must refer this to the hearing of the great God when the year of revenges comes on for the controversy of Zion.

But, if my sister chooses to live to the law, be under it as her only rule of life, walk, and action, not accepting deliverance, she is welcome: let her bow her shoulders to bear, and become a servant to tribute; she will find, ere long, that the lamp will go out, and then she will be calling for oil. She is poor and needy now; but the legal veil sometimes blinds the eyes to that degree, that a person may be poor and wretched, miserable, blind, and naked, and yet not know it. If thou wast to adhere to the voice of Christ in the promises, and to the voice of the Spirit in thy conscience, if it be there, thou wouldst

find a living rule much preferable to a killing letter and a yoke of bondage. On the other hand, she is at full liberty; I have no dominion over her faith. Let her take the portion of goods that fall to her, and gather all together, and trade away with her rule of action; it will not be long before she will find the law, with its gendering yoke, will bring her into the wilderness; and when in a far country and a dry land, she may remember her first husband, turn beggar, and be glad to live by faith on the fatted calf and bread of life. Until when I shall leave Mrs. Instability to make the most of her two opinions: only adding that, should she ever fail in business; should the citizen of that country turn swindler; should she waste her present substance; should the ministers of the letter starve her with husks; when she comes to herself. when her belly is in want, when she is humbled to beg, and longs to come home, I shall not be offended at the music and dancing, but remain the willing servant of Mrs. Prodigalis when the father makes merry.