

Civil Government and the Decalogue

E. J. Waggoner

The advocates of Sunday legislation are earnestly trying to find a basis for their proposed action, in the fourth commandment. It is true that that commandment says nothing about the first day, which is the only day that Sunday reformers would consent to have the State set apart, while it does specifically enjoin the observance of the seventh day; and it is also true that if they could find in the fourth commandment some authority for Sunday observance, that would show beyond the possibility of cavil that their movement is simply an effort to secure religious legislation; but none of these things move them. They have, however, through the kind offices of the *American Sentinel*, been brought to see that civil governments have to do only with civil matters; and, therefore, in order to have a show of reason for their work, they are claiming that there are civil elements in the ten commandments, inasmuch as some of those precepts relate to man's duty to his fellow-men.

There has been in the past a great deal of unnecessary

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discussion over the two tables of the decalogue. It has been rightfully claimed that with the first table of the law civil governments have nothing to do; and the Sunday-law people themselves more than half believe this. Mr. Crafts, who stands for the American Sabbath Union, has spent a great deal of time of late trying to readjust the tables of the law, so as to make the action of his association consistent with the principle just stated. Instead of dividing the decalogue into two tables, the first containing four commandments, and the second the last six, which is the most common division, he makes the division just after the first clause of the fourth commandment, putting the bulk of the fourth, and the last six, into the second table. Of course this is entirely arbitrary, having no authority but Mr. Crafts' assertion; but it serves to show that Mr. Crafts appreciates the truth of the statement that civil governments have of right nothing to do with the first table of the decalogue.

But that statement tells only a part of the truth, and is misleading; for the fact is that civil governments have nothing whatever to do with any of the ten commandments, whether in the first table or in the second. The discussion as to the two tables of the law is entirely unnecessary, and will be seen to be so when the character of the whole law is understood. The proposition which we lay down is this: Civil laws are not based upon, and do not derive their force from, the divine law; and civil government has nothing whatever to do with any commandment of the decalogue. This we think can readily be made to appear.

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1. The law is a unit. It is, as a whole, the expression of God's will, the transcript of his character; and therefore whatever is true of one part of the law is true of the whole.

2. The inspired declaration is that "the law is spiritual." Rom. 7:14. This is spoken, not merely of the first four commandments, but of the whole law. Let us dwell upon this point for a few moments.

While it is true that the first four commandments pertain to our duties to God exclusively, and the last six relate to duties that also affect our fellows, it is not true that there is any less morality or spirituality in the last six than in the first four. Although they define human duties, there is in them no human element. They are spiritual, and obedience to them must be spiritual. Anything else is not obedience.

Take for illustration our Saviour's comments on certain commandments, recorded in Matt. 5:20-28. In that passage we find that a word may be sufficient to constitute a violation of the sixth commandment, and that the seventh may be broken by a single look, or even a thought. It is worthy of note that the commandments whose breadth the Saviour thus indicated, are found in the second table. Now what did he do?-He simply showed what those commandments require. From his words we learn that the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," forbids malicious thoughts and words. He who indulges in these does not keep the commandment at all, although he may never have laid violent hands on any man. The commandment which says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," forbids impure desires. It does

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not stop short of that. He who indulges in these violates the seventh commandment, although he may have lived a hermit all his life.

From the words of the apostle Paul, and the illustrative application of Jesus, we learn that the law-including every commandment-is wholly spiritual. If it is not kept spiritually, it is not kept at all. There is no such thing as degrees in the commandments, so that a man may keep them half way, and receive credit therefor, as seems to be supposed by, those who talk about keeping the law outwardly. It is true that as the greater includes the less, strict compliance with the letter of the law is demanded, and is necessarily included in spiritual obedience; but the man whose apparent conformity to the law is only outward, has not yielded any obedience to it whatever. The law is wholly spiritual, wholly divine.

3. But civil government is not spiritual. No one can gainsay this proposition. Inasmuch as civil government cannot enforce spirituality, and cannot make men spiritually-minded, it has no right nor power to require spirituality. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." A spiritual ruler justly requires spiritual obedience. He can punish for violation of a spiritual law. But a civil ruler cannot execute spiritual law. Therefore the proposition is proved, that civil government has nothing whatever to do with spiritual law, and such a law is the decalogue. This proposition becomes self-evident as soon as one views the law of God in the light in which he himself sets it forth.

We can say, then, without the slightest fear of

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successful contradiction, that human laws are not based upon; and do not derive their force from, the divine law. The State rightfully makes laws against the taking

of human life, but not in any sense as an enforcement of the divine commandment, or of any part of it. Does anybody suppose that a murderer who is legally hanged for his crime, will receive less punishment in the great Judgment-day than if he had escaped the civil penalty?-Of course not. Man punished him for his inhumanity; God punishes for immorality; and the sixth commandment is not human, but divine.

The great cause for confusion lies in a wrong use of terms. Like the hypocritical Pharisees of old, men have come to confound morality and respectability. A man who does nothing to shock the sensibilities of his neighbors, and who does not interfere with their rights, is called a moral man, when in fact he may be grossly immoral. He is a good citizen, but if he is not pure at heart he is not a keeper of the divine law in any sense whatever. That law is spiritual, and that which is not spiritual is not to the slightest degree obedience to it.

If National Reformers and national Sunday-law advocates had any just conception of the nature of divine law, they would cease their insane attempt to make men moral by law, or to enforce the law of God. But because they have no real knowledge of divine government, and fancy themselves competent to act as its high executive officers, they also lose sight of the prime object of civil government, and ruthlessly trample upon human right.

E. J. WAGGONER.