

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

*THE ANTAGONISM OF CHRIST AGAINST
EXTERNALISM.*

I HAVE now traced the growth of that new form and development of the Jewish religion, which, on the one hand, entirely diverted the hearts of the Jews from all tendency to idolatry, but which, unhappily, substituted for the worship of objective idols the fetish-worship of a dead letter, and placed a hideous mummery of ceremonialism on the pedestal of a true and living faith. It was against this oral law, this system of baseless tradition, this ritualistic decrepitude, this Rabbinism enforced by a professoriate of inflated Pharisees, that our Lord directed his most burning words of wrath and denunciation. To individual scribes and Pharisees He always shewed that perfect courtesy, and forbearance, and gentleness which are essential to the ideal of a truly noble personality; but against the Rabbinic college as a dominant body, against the scribes and Pharisees as a powerful and tyrannic school, He flung the blighting flash of a terrible invective. There have been some who have dared to speak of such language as uncharitable; but the most tender-hearted, the most unselfish saints of God who have ever lived, know well that charity is something far other than a weak toleration of aggressive and insolent error; and that it not only endorses but positively requires a spirit of unsparing conflict against oppression, falsity, and wrong.

Let us by all means have "sweetness and light;" but let not the sweetness be the deleterious sweetness of subtle poisons, or the light be like that which

plays over the iridescence of stagnant pools. Times there are when serene magnanimity and playful good temper must be replaced by passionate indignation and burning moral resentment; and it has been remarked as a reiterated lesson of history, that when an age is very indifferent, and a religion very corrupt, more will be effected by the "divine brutality" of a Luther than by the polished irony of an Erasmus or even by the genial tenderness of a Melancthon.

If then Christ's rebukes of the Pharisees be studied it will be found that his charges against their system are fundamentally reducible to two, namely:—(1) The unprofitable *minuteness*—the washings of cup and platter, the tithings of mint and anise and cummin—which made the oral law an intolerable burden to the life and conscience. (2) The utter hypocrisy of the system, manifested by the fact that it "transgressed" or "made of none effect" the very law which it proposed to reverence; and that so far from accomplishing its avowed purpose of "raising a hedge about the law," it destroyed that hedge of simple obedience and natural reverence which might otherwise have existed, and left the sacred vineyard defenceless, for every wild boar to devastate, and for every little fox to spoil.

I. The first of these charges—the charge of unprofitable minuteness—needs no confirmation. The truth of it is patent to the most superficial glance at the regulations of which any treatise of the Talmud is full. It is the natural and inevitable result of the multitudinous precepts, the endless and constantly conflicting Halachôth, of which I have given

some specimens in the preceding papers. The motto to the Talmud might well be that condemnation of its spirit which Jesus uttered, "Finely do ye do away with the commandment of God, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." Rabbis might revel in a superstitious scrupulosity which demanded a far less painful sacrifice than would have been required by the obedience of the heart; but the poor *Am ha-arets*—the "unlearned men" whom they so insolently despised—would find it impossible to master the tedious length and labyrinthine intricacy of a system of casuistry the most recondite and the most profoundly worthless which has ever weighed like an incubus on the religion of any people. The sudden and energetic outburst of St. Peter, against the system which he, like every other Jew, had been trained so intensely to reverence, was but the utterance of a sentiment which lay unexpressed in many a heart. It was not the Mosaic system alone, but the Mosaic system as interpreted by those authorized exponents who alone at that day possessed the ear of the people, which St. Peter¹ branded as "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." Peter and John had already been contemptuously dismissed by the Sanhedrin as "mere ignorant nobodies,"² and the complaints which Peter so boldly uttered in the synod at Jerusalem, however offensive they may have sounded to the Pharisaic party, must have awoken a powerful echo in the hearts of many of the *Amharatsim* who heard them.

A story from a Talmudic book³ may however

¹ Acts xv. 10.

² Ibid. iv. 13. ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἰδιῶται.

³ Jalkuth Simeon, f. 229. 4. (Schüttgen in Acts xv. 10.)

serve to illustrate the unexpressed feeling which must have been smouldering in so many minds. Korah, the schismatic of the wilderness, is there introduced telling the following story. "There was a widow who had two orphan daughters. She had a field, and when she wanted to plough it, some one came and said to her, 'Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass.'¹ When she wanted to sow, he said, 'Thou shalt not sow with diverse kinds of seeds.'² When she wanted to reap, he said, 'Thou shalt leave handfuls and a corner for the poor.'³ When she was preparing her threshing-floor he said, 'Give me the *terumah*⁴ and the first and second tithes.' She met all his demands, add then [not liking all this interference] sold her field and bought two ewes, that she might get clothing from their wool, and some gain from their lambs. When they lambed, came Aaron, and said, 'Give me the first-fruits, for thus saith God to me, "Every firstling that opens the matrix is mine."⁵ She gave him the two lambs. When the shearing came, he said, 'Give me the first-fruits of the shearing.' She did so, and then said, 'I cannot stand before this man. I will kill my ewes and eat them.' After she had killed them, he came and said, 'Give me the shoulder and the breast.'⁶ The woman said, 'Am I not free from this man even after I have killed my ewes? Lo! I make these a *Cherem*—consecrated to God.' Then Aaron said, 'It is *all* mine, for God hath said, "Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine."⁷ So he took it all

¹ Deut. xxii. 10.² Ibid. xxii. 9.³ See Lev. xix. 9, 10.⁴ A general word for gifts to the priests. See Exod. xxv. 2. Lev. vii. 32, &c.⁵ Exod. xxxiv. 19.⁶ Ibid. xxix. 27, &c.⁷ Num. xviii. 14.

and departed, and left the widow and her daughters weeping."

Indeed, how could any yoke be otherwise than grievous which, according to the Rabbis, involved obedience to 583 precepts; namely, 218 affirmatives, being as many as the limbs in the body, and 365 negatives, as many as the days in the year? Even in Palestine it was difficult enough to keep such a multitude of laws and observances, apart from the innumerable inferences deduced from them; but how infinitely more difficult was this task for those myriads of Jews who, living in heathen lands, came into daily collision with inevitable circumstances, which in thousands of ways involved the possibility of ceremonial pollution. His *cophinus foenumque, supellex*¹—the invariable basket and bag which the Jew carried with him in heathen countries, to keep his food from pollution—was but a very small part of the hourly trouble entailed upon him by rules which became more stringent in the letter as they became more and more forgotten in spirit.

2. But besides a strong reprobation of these burdensome and unmeaning minutiae, the second charge of Christ against the Rabbinic system was that it was stained through and through with that worst kind of *hypocrisy* which secretly undermines and destroys that which it places in the forefront of its professed reverence. The loud exclamations of eminent Rabbis against the methods of Rabbi Akibha, which I have already quoted, shew that some of the Rabbis themselves were well aware of the possible abuses of their system, and of the excessive lengths of extravagance

¹ Juv. Sat. iii. 14.

to which it was gradually pushed. Yet the forty-two rules of Akibha were but expansions of those seven middôth and of that general style of exegesis which, before the Christian era, had received the entire sanction of Hillel and Shammai, and which was the prevalent erudition in the days of our Lord. And the great majority of the Rabbis were easily reconciled to any amount of hair-splitting and tampering with the text of Scripture, because they had accepted without question the stupid fiction as to the Sinaitic origin of the oral law, and had been trained from infancy to attach the extremest value to worthless Halachôth, the knowledge of which had cost them years of labour to acquire. They were not likely to give up a system their identification with which constituted their main importance in the eyes of the multitude, and won for them the intense devotion of troops of admiring disciples. A few illustrations from the Talmud will alike support and illustrate the remarks I have been making.

(1) It is laid down by eminent Jewish doctors,¹ that just as the law of the Sabbatic year was published on Sinai, so also were its minutest details and inferences. This was held to be so absolutely true, that even Moses is only supposed to be handing down rules already known to Abraham. "We find," says the Mishnah, "that our father Abraham practised the entire law before it was promulgated, since Scripture gives him this testimony, 'Abraham has obeyed my voice, observed my precepts, laws, and ordinances.'"² In the Gemara of the Tract Yoma,³

¹ See the Boraitha, quoted by Rashi on Lev. xxv. 1. (Weil, *Le Judaïsme*, iii. 263.)

² Kidûshîn, f. 4.

³ Weil, *ubi supra*.

we find "Abraham practised not only all that is contained in the *written* law, but all the *oral* law, even up to the purely Rabbinic precept of the *Erúbh Tabshíllín*¹ [or 'mixture' respecting the cooking of food]; for it is said, 'He observed my *laws*,' in the plural, indicating the union of the written and the oral law." A later Talmudist may well ask whether it is possible to take this precept literally, considering that in Abraham's time no festivals had been yet instituted? The answer to the query is that Abraham shewed himself as careful an observer of the religious and moral law *as if* he had already known it in its least details.

(2) But a certain misgiving as to the tendency of this "tradition as old as Sinai"—this *Halachah le-Mosheh Missinai*—joined to a profound belief in its importance, are most strikingly seen in the following anecdote from the Menachôth. "When Moses ascended to heaven to receive the Tables of the Law,

¹ When a festival fell on the eve of the Sabbath, the oral law declared it to be unlawful to bake or cook on that day what was to be eaten on the morrow. Ordinarily the difficulty would have been obviated by the very simple and summary evasion of cooking on the feast-day more than was actually wanted for the day, and making believe that it was accidentally left over. Thus, the Rabbis say, "A woman may fill a pot with meat, though she only wants one piece. A man may salt a great many pieces of meat, though he only wants one," &c. But in *this* instance, curiously enough, this particular evasion was forbidden. What then could be done? The *Erúbh*, or "mixture," came in, which, to distinguish it from the other precious hypocrisies of the same kind, was called *Erúbh Tabshíllín*. It consisted in the master of a family taking a cake, and a piece of meat, fish, &c., handing it to some one who stood by—who was supposed ideally to represent all the other Jewish inhabitants of the city—and saying, "Blessed be Thou, O Lord God, . . . who hast sanctified us, . . . and *commanded us concerning the mixture*." By this "mixture" it became lawful to prepare any food on the festival for the Sabbath (Levi's Prayers, v. 4, 5).

he found Jehovah engaged in putting the tittles¹ to the letters of the Thorah. 'What is the meaning,' asked Moses, 'of this crowning of the simple letters?' 'It is,' the Lord answered him, 'because, generations after your time, there shall rise a man named Akibha Ben Yoseph, who will know how to derive mountain-loads of Halachôth from every corner and angle of a letter.' 'May I see him?' asked Moses. 'Retire backwards, and you shall see him.'² Moses retires a little, and in vision sees and hears the illustrious doctor, *but does not understand him*. He is deeply saddened by this fact, when he hears one of the Rabbi's pupils ask him, 'Rabbi, whence is this assertion derived?' 'It is,' answered Akibha, '*an Halachah revealed to Moses on Sinai*.' And on hearing these words, Moses recovered his tranquillity of mind."³

Now the *hypocrisy* of the Rabbinic system consisted in thus professing unbounded allegiance to the Mosaic legislation, while yet, for their own social or individual convenience, they contrived all kinds of methods which not only violated the letter of it,

¹ *Κεραΐαι*, the horns and tips of letters; such, for instance, as distinguishes ד from ך, or ה from ן, or ב from ן. About these tittles, the Jews used to say, if any one in Deut. vi. 4 changes Daleth (ד) into Resh (ר), he will shake the universe, for then he makes God not one (אחד), but false (אחר). So in Lev. xxii. 32, if any one changes Cheth (ח) into He (ה), he shakes the universe, for then he says, "Thou shalt not praise (יהלל) the name of the Lord," instead of "Thou shalt not profane (יתלל) the name of the Lord," &c. *Vajikra Rabba*, f. 162, 1. (Schöttgen in *Matt.* v. 18.)

² *I.e.*, see a proleptic and antenatal vision of him. The Jews believe or imagine that the souls of all the Jews as yet unborn were summoned to Sinai to hear the law.

³ *Menachôth*, 28. (Weil, *Le Judaïsme*, iii. 268.)

but also nullified the very principles which it was intended to support.¹

Thus, if there was one regulation more than another which was significant of the aim of the Mosaic system, it was the law about the Sabbatic year. That law was intended to lay an axe at the root, not only of all greed and avarice, but also of the commercial spirit, from which greed and avarice so frequently arise. It was clearly the design of the Mosaic law to teach the Jews, by its entire scope even more than by separate regulations, that they were to be *in* the world of the nations, but not *of* it, and that their public and private institutions were to be based on hopes and desires which had no resemblance to the common life of the Gentile world. And since commerce is the great leveller of distinctions, the great unifying force in society, Moses discouraged by all possible means the commercial intercourse, which would have been certain to issue in cosmopolitan views. And in order that there might be no commerce between Israel and other nations, he tried to crush all tendency to it, by rendering it all but impossible among the children of Israel themselves. Mosaism is, in its genius and colouring, essentially agricultural, and the "merchant" became almost a synonym for the Midianite or the Canaanite.² Nothing at all resembling the ordinary rules of commerce could have flourished among a people to whom it had been promulgated as a sacred obligation that they should, at the return of every seventh year, regard every debt as cancelled, re-

¹ See the Talmudic treatises, Erûbhîn and Moed Katôn.

² Thus, in the Targum of Jonathan, the word "trader" is substituted for "Canaanite," in Zech. xiv. 21.

store every field or house that they had purchased, and set free every Hebrew slave, unless he demanded a voluntary servitude. Such institutions would only be possible in a very early and almost rudimentary stage of society; they could only be maintained in their sincerity among people who were animated with that glow of religious enthusiasm which has ever been evanescent in proportion to its early warmth. By the confession of the Jews themselves, the rigid institution of the Sabbatical year¹ fell into early and total desuetude, even while Israel and Judah were still independent, and mainly agricultural, kingdoms. But after the Exile and the Dispersion, the Jews, in every corner of the civilized world, developed that prodigious commercial activity, and that remarkable financial genius, which shewed that, up to that time, the natural instincts of the race had been diverted into uncongenial channels. The Jews rapidly became—what they still continue to be—the middle-men, the bankers, the usurers, of every country on the shores of the Mediterranean. Nor was it possible that the Hebrews of Palestine should not be influenced by the general characteristic of their race throughout the world. Here, then, was a point in which the Mosaic law came into direct collision with the national determination. Now, an honest people would, under these circumstances, have given up their commercial pursuits in deference to the law which they professed to adore above all things, or would have frankly confessed that the provisions of the law were antiquated

¹ The Jews hold that the Captivity lasted seventy years, that "the land might enjoy her Sabbaths," *i.e.*, all the Sabbatical years which they had neglected for 490 years.

and obsolete; and that, in these particulars, they must be regarded as null and void, because they had been superseded by the necessities of society or refuted by the logic of facts. But the Jewish Rabbis followed neither course. They were like those heathen who chalked over the black spots upon a victim, in order to pass it off as white, and so to cheat their facile deities. Hillel, even Hillel, provided the Jews of his day with a notable subterfuge whereby they could, as it were, *deceive* God by the semblance of obedience to the law, and yet pursue, at will, their own devices. This plan was called *Prosbol* (פרובול), and simply consisted in pretending to reverence and carry out the law, while really going through a preconcerted farce. The creditor would simply say to the debtor, "This being the Sabbatic year, I release you from your debt;" whereupon, as prearranged, the debtor would say, "I am much obliged to you, but I prefer to pay it." Did the Jews refrain from laughing in their sleeve while they thus "honoured God with their lips," and "denied Him in their double hearts"? while they thus elevated the law into a fetish, and unceremoniously pushed the fetish aside when it interfered with their intentions?

It was the same with the Sabbath. In the Gospels alone are recorded six fierce disputes of the Pharisees with Christ because He performed works of mercy, involving no labour whatever, but conflicting with some of their *abhôth* and *toldoth*,¹ on the Sabbath day. Yet they never stuck at any "management," however transparently deceitful, which enabled them to do what they liked to do on the Sabbath. Thus,

¹ See my "Life of Christ," i. 433-435, for explanation of these terms.

by a wonderfully intricate deduction, they had got their rule that no one on the Sabbath was to walk more than two thousand yards.¹ Now, one of their chief pleasures was to dine with each other on the Sabbath, but as their houses were often more than a Sabbath day's distance, and as in any case no burden, however small, could be carried on the Sabbath, what were they to do? Forego their pleasure? *That* never occurred to them. The Sadducees, with defiant boldness, quietly announced that their meals might practically be regarded as an extension of the temple worship, and therefore claimed for them the famous exemption of, "No Sabbatism in the temple;" and, without further ado, proceeded to feast with each other as much as they liked. The Pharisees treated the difficulty with deceitful scrupulosity and hypocritic evasiveness. By putting up lintels and doorposts at the end of streets, they regarded the whole length of a street as being, *pro tanto*, a single house, and in a house or "private jurisdiction" (*i.e.*, any place surrounded by walls ten handbreadths high) the rule was that a thing might be moved the whole length of the place, even though it were many miles. Since, however, in a "public jurisdiction," or in what they called a *karmelith*, things might not be moved more than four ells, a new device was ready

¹ The way in which they got at this rule is so illustrative of Rabbinic exegesis, that it should be mentioned here. In Exodus xvi. 29 a Jew is forbidden on the Sabbath to "go out of his place" (*mākôm*), and in Exodus xxi. 13 the accidental homicide has a place (*mākôm*) appointed to which he can flee; and this place, before the existence of refuge cities, was to be the Levitical suburb, which was 2,000 yards from the camp. Since, then, the accidental homicide did not violate the Sabbath by going 2,000 yards, by one of Hillel's *middôth*—the rule, namely, of "analogy"—it was allowed to all other people.

at hand for them. "Every man," they said, "has got four ells in which he may move things;" and so, though he would be "guilty of death" if he moved a thing *five* ells in such places, he might carry it four ells, and then give it to a neighbour, who should carry it four ells more, and so on, for a hundred miles, if necessary. By a judicious application of such rules the Pharisees were naturally able to dine together on the Sabbath as much as they liked. Thus literally did they justify our Lord's reproach, that they laid on men's shoulders burdens grievous to be borne, but would not themselves touch those burdens with one of their fingers.

Ludicrous stories are told of the wretched hypocrisies produced by the survival of these follies down to the present day. In Safed, for instance, Dr. Thomson tells us that since the town is unwall'd, and since anything, even to a pocket-handkerchief, is in the Sabbatic point of view "a burden," it would be unlawful for any of the Jews to carry a pocket-handkerchief in the streets on Sunday; just as in London it used to be quite common down to a very recent time, and perhaps is so now, for Jews on the Sabbath to wear the pocket-handkerchief tied round the knee *as though it were a garter*, by which device it ceases to be a burden. At Safed the little difficulty is got over by tying strings on poles at the end of the streets, which strings are conventionally regarded as walls, and by virtue of these strings the pocket-handkerchief may be carried in the pocket without violating the Sabbath, or incurring the penalty of being stoned to death! Thus fortified by a fictitious wall against an imaginary sacrilege, the Jew can walk

securely *within* the limits of Safed, but not *beyond* it. On one occasion, however, in walking with Dr. Thomson, a Jew, armed with his pocket-handkerchief, found that the string at the end of the street had fallen. Was he then disturbed in conscience by the discovery that, however unwittingly, he had violated the oral law? Not at all. The wall was down; he could therefore pursue his walk over and beyond the limits of Safed, for he had not passed the wall!

Similarly, Dr. McCaul tells us that he once saw a Jew give a copper to a beggar on a Sunday. The Talmudists immediately attacked him for profaning the Sabbath. His ready reply was that it was quite by accident, or through mere forgetfulness, that he was carrying the coin in his pocket, and he only gave it to the beggar in order to get rid of it *because* it was the Sabbath.

Strange that puerilities so monstrous should for so many centuries have been identified with religious observance. Yet the Talmud is full of them.

Thus it is forbidden to move a corpse on the Sabbath, but not to carry bread from one spot to another. All, therefore, that need be done is to put a piece of bread on the corpse, and, under pretence of taking it again, adroitly to draw the corpse along the floor.¹

Again, R. Meir pretended that by subtle inferences he could change things unclean by the Mosaic law into things clean, and *vice versa*.² Nay, he held

¹ Several such ruses are found in Shabbath, f. 30, 2; f. 117, 2, &c. (Chiarini, *Théorie du Judaïsme*, i. 266.) The necessity of removing a corpse at once was an Halachah inferred from the special instance mentioned in Deut. xxi. 23.

² Erûbhîn, 13, 2; Sanhedrin, 17, 1.

that a man was not fit to be elected a Sanhedrist unless he could do this in spite of the letter of the law.

A hide must not be salted on the Sabbath, but it is lawful to salt meat for roasting on the top of the hide. "A little meat is salted on one part, and then another on another part, till the whole hide is salted."

If a beast is dying, a Jew must not kill it on the Sabbath merely *because* it is dying. But if he can eat as much of its flesh as the size of an olive, he may then kill it, because he can make believe that he did so for necessary purposes of food.

A man may not buy on the Sabbath, but he may go to a shopkeeper and say, "Give me this or that." He may then call and pay for it on the next day.

It would be tedious and needless to adduce more of the many similar instances which prove the utter hypocrisy of the Pharisaic system. Can any one say that these evasions were one bit less childish than those of the heathen, who chalked over the black spots on the nominally white oxen which they offered to the gods?

But it was only when similar principles of interpretation and inference were applied to subjects of grave moral import that the mischievous results of the whole system became most glaringly apparent. Our Lord adduced one instance in which the sacerdotal greed and vanity which regulated the Corban were applied to rob parents of the support and honour due to them from their children; and He alluded to the strange perversion which had made the Mosaic law seem to teach hatred of our enemies, and to the laxity introduced by Halachists of

the school of Hillel into the subject of divorce. We have no space left to illustrate these points, but we have already seen enough to justify and emphasize the righteous anger which repeated eight times in succession, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, *hypocrites!*"

F. W. FARRAR.

THE GOSPEL IN THE EPISTLES.

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, and suffered under Pontius Pilate.

BETWEEN these two articles, the one speaking of the commencement, the other of the closing scenes of the earthly life of Jesus, the Creeds insert no word to tell us of the mighty works which were performed, and the wondrous lessons which were given by Him in the interval. To believe that Jesus took our nature, and in the end died for our salvation; that in His humanity He wrought out the work of redemption, comprehends all the remaining truths of Christianity. On these two articles rests all the Christian's faith.

But in an investigation such as that in which we have engaged, there must of necessity be much to say concerning the active years of the life of Christ, and also of the lessons which He gave to His disciples, and through them to the world. It is with these latter, the teachings of Christ, that we at present propose to deal. During His life, both friends and foes confessed that never man spake like this man; and it has often been pointed out that His lessons must have given the world a surprise, for they were such as men had never heard of before.