

What does God's Law Say to the Statement:
"You May Attend Your Church, But You May Not Practice Your Religion"
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I think it's wonderful that you've been studying the letters from Nathan Talbot so diligently and working to support our legal rights as Christian Scientists to practice spiritual healing. I too have been studying these letters and appreciating the information and excellent spiritual points they contain.

I was grateful to be asked to meet with you because I knew it meant I would have to think very deeply about these legal cases and our general right to practice spiritual healing. Not that I hadn't been thinking and praying deeply, because I have. But in meeting with you, I'd have to organize my thoughts in a way that I wouldn't otherwise have to do.

This of course is what I've been doing since the church called me; and I had put together a number of ideas and developed them -- really more than I could cover in this meeting. So it was necessary to cut down and focus more directly.

Basically, I had developed these ideas into three parts, and I'll still be following this order. But last Wednesday night after church, a member who had just come from Sarasota, Florida, handed me a packet of newspaper clippings from the Sarasota Herald-Tribune. They were reports on the Hermanson case there. As you probably know, on April 18 a jury brought in a verdict of guilty of child abuse and third degree murder for these Christian Science parents. I was up until after midnight before I'd gotten through all of the clippings.

I've had a close contact with this case in many ways from the start, so I've been pretty aware of the

events and publicity over these past 2½ years since their daughter's passing.

As I read these reports, I think it dawned on me more than ever that the answer to the legal restrictions we're facing is to continue practicing Christian Science effectively. I know this may sound over-familiar and maybe over-simplified, but it still is the way that our right to rely on spiritual means will be recognized. The considerations and amendments in the law that we now have didn't come because Christian Science was ineffective in healing. Legislators responded to these requests for legal exemption because there was a significant body of responsible citizens whose lives showed they were able to preserve their health and the health of their children through applying Christian Science, that is, through purely spiritual means. And they could do so with a high degree of success.

At the moment, we're facing a wave of great concern over child abuse in society.

The concern takes many forms, but the immediate issue seems to be medication of children. There's pressure for increased control by the state in determining what is best for the children. In other words, the parents are given fewer rights to decide what is best for their own children.

But what's the real issue here? Isn't it the question of how we view God and man? Christian Science teaches the totally spiritual and perfect nature of God and man. This is the basis of our healing work. The world sees God either as limited or else as creating both good and evil, and the world seems man as both material and spiritual and concludes that material methods are needed to care for the material part of man.

Are we going to regard these two viewpoints as a battle line with us on one side ^{and} the world on the other?

It's true there is a battle line, but where is it drawn? It's not drawn between people, but it's drawn in the thinking of each one of us. Each one of us is having to decide which is the true view of God and man -- the spiritual and perfect or the material and imperfect. Everyone else in the world is having to make this same decision. So rather than being opponents, we're actually all united in our efforts to see that there is a higher power governing us, that it is entirely good, and therefore we can expect perfection for ourselves and others.

We as Christian Scientists have a special responsibility to help mankind because we've been given the gift of this pure statement of the Christ, Truth.

I don't know what changes may take place in the law. I don't know how specific cases are going to come out. But this I do know: It's the quality of our

thought that sets the tone for the Movement and for our healing practice. That's why we're meeting here today.

And as that tone is spiritually oriented and is helpful towards others, we'll find that the laws will not only accommodate the practice of Christian Science but they will want the practice of Christian Science. So let's approach our discussion today with the attitude of total helpfulness.

I understand the topic you're currently studying is "What does God's law say to the statement: 'You may attend your church, but you may not practice your religion'."

What does God law say? God's law is the law of Love. It's the law of helpfulness. So it says, "You must help others to overcome their fear of disease and to see spiritual healing as the real answer to their need. You must know that God's law is acting on your behalf even while you are obeying legal requirements of

the state and that nothing can prevent the full healing effect of God's law."

We find God's law recorded, of course, in the Bible. The Bible is the record of God's law put into action. So let's begin to taking a little look at what the Bible records about individuals who obeyed God's law. I want to mention several of these people and think about some of the characteristics they expressed because these are characteristics we can express today. These characteristics have helped humanity through the centuries, and they're what will enable us to help humanity today.

One of the earliest people who heard God's law was Noah. Noah was surrounded by wickedness in the world. He illustrates how a person can make his own decision regardless of what others are thinking. His obedience to God's law was an ark, which Mrs. Eddy defines as "safety." And that safety is something we

can be assured of when we follow God's law. In fact, this is the only way we can feel truly safe. It didn't matter that the entire rest of the world was going in an opposite direction. Noah was able to give it a fresh start. He refused to be influenced by the mortal, sensual thinking of others.

Then there was Abraham. Abraham went out from Ur, an ancient city noted for its libraries and knowledge. We're told he looked for a city "that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He illustrates how we look for a city, an environment, a consciousness, a body to dwell in whose builder and maker is God. We don't settle for a material physique controlled by genes and chemistry. Abraham was willing to leave the comfortable and familiar views of the culture he'd grown up in and to search for the higher views.

Moses illustrates obeying God's law. He led a nation of people out of political slavery. But even more, he led them out of the slavery of immorality and materialism by spelling out God's law in the Ten Commandments.

Mrs. Eddy likened Moses' work at that time to the work of Christian Science today when she writes, "The lame, the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the sick, the sensual, the sinner, I wished to save from the slavery of their own beliefs and from the educational systems of the Pharoahs, who to-day, as of yore, hold the children of Israel in bondage." (S&H 226:25-29)

Jeremiah was listening to God's law when he spoke of the false prophets that cried, "...Peace, peace; when there is no peace." (Jer. 8:11) The false prophets pacified them by saying they were the chosen people and had nothing to fear. But they did not define the nature of God's people accurately to them.

Don't we hear the same today -- "God made medicine, so you have nothing to fear." But the medicine God made is Mind, not matter. Today's false prophets don't define the medicine of divine Mind accurately.

No wonder Jeremiah asked "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (v. 22)

Daniel and the three Hebrew boys are further examples where the world's laws and beliefs could not hinder them from practicing the truth they perceived and believed.

All of these are instances where government control or religious and social customs could not prevent people from following God's law.

In the New Testament, we start off with an example of false law trying to cut off the Christ-idea when Herod decreed the death of all male infants.

God's law protected Jesus from this when Joseph and Mary took him to Egypt. Later, the authorities denied God's law of spiritual healing when Jesus gave sight to the man who had been blind from birth. The man told them that Jesus had healed him, and for that he was put out of the synagogue. But the man was rewarded. By listening to God's law, the blind man not only had his human sight restored but he recognized the Christ in Jesus as well.

So we have abundant evidence of the benefit of following God's law.

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Now we come to the second point I want to discuss. All right, if there is such benefit, why has there been so much resistance throughout history to obeying God's law and to the spiritual healing that results from this obedience? Why do we find this resistance against trusting God's law of spiritual

healing today? Isn't resistance often due to fear? Let's take the current legal issue where some people are trying to get the courts to say, as our subject states, "You may attend your church, but you may not practice your religion." You may study Christian Science, but you may not apply it in caring for the health of your children. What is the specific fear that lies behind this restriction? The public might say "Our fear is that spiritual healing is ineffective and therefore dangerous because it withholds the medical treatment that safeguards the health of the child. Furthermore, the child has no free choice in the matter, and therefore, his rights to health are being denied."

We could say this concern about endangering the health of children springs from people's love for children. No doubt this true. And when people think about a child being harmed or deprived, they can feel very deeply emotional about it. We all feel this way.

I'm sure this is a point that the opponents of Christian Science play very strongly on. However, it's this very love of children that impels us to seek the best care available. So when we present an enlightened message of how to ensure the health of the child most effectively, we're responding to this love that people have for children. As we get this message across, we'll be correcting erroneous viewpoints like the one expressed by the Assistant State's Attorney in his closing arguments in the Hermanson case in Florida. He said, "If they wish to become martyrs to their religion, they have that right. But I contend to you that they do not have the right to make a martyr of a seven-year-old girl."

You and I know that Christian Science parents select spiritual healing because of their deep faith in God to establish and maintain the health of all His children. In this way, Christian Science parents are selecting the method they feel to be most effective and, we might even say, that they're striving to protect

their children against becoming martyrs to medical theories and false general material beliefs.

Now here someone might say, "Yes, but don't non-Christian Science parents pray to God for their children too? Don't they try to place their children under God's law?" That's a good question. Of course they do! But how does the Christian Scientist's trust in God's power to care for his children differ from the trust that many religious parents have when they pray to God at the same time they're placing their child under medical treatment.

This I think is a key point that generally is not grasped by the general public, and it all revolves around our concept of prayer. When people think of prayer, don't they generally think of imploring some higher power to act in a benevolent way and heal some real material condition? This, it seems to me, is where we need to make the distinction clear between the

Christian Scientist's concept of prayer and the general concept of prayer that the world holds. The Christian Scientist sees God's power as taking away the belief that man is material and vulnerable. As we keep this distinction clear within our own thinking, we'll not only be able to communicate it to others but we'll assure that our own practice can fulfill the tremendous potential for effective healing that Christian Science provides.

So maybe fear for the health of children is not the real reason that people resist trusting God's law as the means for healing. Is it possible that people are entertaining a deeper fear that they may not be aware of? Isn't this deeper fear a fear that trusting God's law will cause them to give up their present view of their mortal identity? I think that's often a big reason why people are reluctant to look into Christian Science. They don't want to yield up their present mortal view of themselves. And this is the point of distinction.

between orthodox prayer and prayer in Christian Science.

In Christian Science, we pray to let go of our mortal view of man and to see him as spiritual, living entirely under God's law of harmony and perfection. Orthodox prayer tends to perpetuate the mortal view of man.

The Apostle Peter took this wholly spiritual approach when he and John healed the lame man at the gate of the temple called beautiful. What stirred up so much resistance? Why did the religious and civil authorities order them not to promote their beliefs and practices any more? The man had been marvelously healed! Let's look at the explanation Peter gave about how the man was healed and see why the authorities might resist it. You remember the people had crowded around them, admiring them, and marveling. The first thing Peter did was to correct the people's thought that they had brought about this healing through some special power or will of their own. He said, "...why

marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" (Acts 3:12) So it wasn't human willpower or any action of the human mind that produced the healing.

Peter said, "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus;" (v. 13) Wouldn't this mean that God had brought out the immortal, spiritual nature of Jesus?

Following this, Peter gave the clear explanation of how the healing had been accomplished. He said, "...his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know:" (v. 16)

The word "name" when it appears in the Bible is generally synonymous with the word "nature." So Peter was explaining that the Christ-nature through faith in the Christ-nature had made this man strong whom they saw and knew.

This is far different from the orthodox view of calling on the name of Jesus as one would call a human person to help. Faith in the nature of Christ Jesus meant having faith that man as expressed by Christ Jesus -- that is, man as the son of God, must be God-like, spiritual, immortal, and perfect.

You remember the thoroughness with which Jesus had taught Peter this lesson. Mrs. Eddy goes into considerable detail on pages 136 through 138 of Science & Health. Jesus started the lesson by asking his disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Mrs. Eddy paraphrases it, "That is: Who or what is it that is thus identified with casting out evils and healing the sick?" (136:12-14) The disciples replied that some people thought he was John the Baptist, or Elias, or Jeremias, or one of the prophets. In other words, that Jesus was sort of a medium, controlled by the spirit of John, or of Elias. In this

answer, of course, there was no perception of Jesus' real identity.

When Jesus pressed them to think more deeply, it was Peter who gave the right answer. He said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (137:17-18) Peter saw what Jesus' real identity was as the son or direct expression of God. This was the identity Jesus exemplified. This was the Godlike identity Jesus perceived in those he healed. As he did perceive it clearly, the specific false concepts about that person's identity were corrected. This is the way healings occur in Christian Science today. The specific false concepts are corrected in a way that meets the person's immediate need.

Let me say here that Christian Scientists need to be very humble in their claim to have demonstrated the perfect, spiritual nature of man. This demonstration is so vast that we can hardly begin to measure it. As we do approach our demonstration in deepest humility,

we'll be sensitive to the demands on us; we'll respond willingly; and we'll find that the Christ, the manifestation of God, does answer every need along the way. If the answer is delayed, we know that God will continue speaking until the answer is fully revealed.

Are we saying in our discussion of prayer here that the prayers of non-Christian Scientists are ineffectual? Not at all. Whenever anyone turns to God as a higher, benevolent power with full faith, he inevitably dispels some fear in his consciousness, and this produces a healing benefit.

The reason that people's prayers are not more effective is that they are still acknowledging matter as substance and as a power that can operate in opposition to God. They may not put it in those terms, but that's what it amounts to. And as long as they accept matter as substance, with no mental challenge, they're going to regard matter as the condition of man, and regard the adjustment of matter as the means of solving people's problems.

No matter how widely those beliefs are held, they don't have to restrict you or me, and as we refuse to let them restrict us, we'll be helping to break down the false beliefs for others.

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This brings us to the final part of our discussion: How can we apply God's law to allay the fears the public has regarding Christian Science healing?

Let me take four false beliefs and touch on them briefly. These are false beliefs that people hold generally and they're major obstacles to accepting the power of God's law in healing.

1. Spiritual means are not curative, or at least not dependably so. This leads the list as to why opponents to Christian Science try to claim that it is dangerous. The premise of this false belief is that man is material, and therefore spiritually mental treatment cannot have any effect. The only exception would be a so-called

miracle, which would set aside the law of physics. This is regarded as rare, at best, and therefore undependable. Christian Science refutes this false belief by showing that our entire experience is a mental one and that what we see, feel, hear, taste, and smell all takes place in consciousness and that nothing exists as external to this consciousness. Early philosophers and thinkers have put forth such a premise, but their premise never separated a materially imperfect consciousness from a divinely perfect consciousness. This clear distinction was spelled out only in Christian Science, the final revelation of Truth, which built on Jesus' life and works as well as other spiritually-minded people in the Bible. These examples all pointed to God as perfect Mind and Love and His creation, man, as the consciousness or expression only of what God is.

Spiritual treatment, that is, Christian Science, does heal because the problem is a mental objectification and

not a physical condition no matter how real or external that physical condition may seem to be. The fact that it's a mental condition does not of itself bring healing. The fact that a problem is mental, however, does render it correctable by replacing the abnormal material picture with the perception of spiritual harmony which God imparts. Not only do we say that Christian Science heals, but we also say that no healing is complete or genuine until thought is aligned with the divine rather than the material.

2. A second claim is that it's dangerous for a person's health to go unmonitored, that is, without physical examination. Also, that if there is some abnormality, there needs to be a physical diagnosis in order to determine what the problem is in order to heal it and also to be sure that it isn't something serious and dangerous.

Let me respond to this fear with a quotation found in Nathan Talbot's letter of May 1988. He quotes

Dr. Robert Mendelsohn. I've been a fan of Dr. Mendelsohn for a number of years, ever since reading his book, "How to Raise a Healthy Child in Spite of Your Doctor." Here's the quote from Dr. Mendelsohn: "Almost everything doctors do is based on a conjecture, a guess, a clinical impression, a whim, a hope, a wish, an opinion or a belief. Thus medicine is not a science at all, but a belief system." Mrs. Eddy brings this out in many places.

Here are two statements, one indicating the unreliability of diagnoses and the other indicating the negative effect. In the first statement, she explains, "The material physician gropes among phenomena, which fluctuate every instant under influences not embraced in his diagnosis, and so he may stumble and fall in the darkness." (S&H 463:1) The patient's condition is a combination of his own thought, the doctor's thought, and general world thought. Since we are dealing with thoughts and not with actual material conditions, these

thoughts do indeed fluctuate and react to many influences, as Mrs. Eddy says, "not embraced in his diagnosis."

The other statement is the familiar one, "A physical diagnosis of disease--since mortal mind must be the cause of disease--tends to induce disease." (S&H 370:20) The very act of focusing on the body and emphasizing the reality of disease tends to increase the belief in disease.

The Bible gives the true view of diagnosis in the counsel of Isaiah where he says, "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me." (Isa. 45:11) We ask God what is true about ourselves, and then we get His answer of our perfection. This is even stated in the following verse, "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." (v. 12)

This doesn't mean we're unaware of the nature of physical problems or the trends of human thought regarding them. We're very keenly aware of them, but as we hold to the spiritual ideal, then whatever departs from that stands out in bold relief as identified and, importantly, is corrected with the spiritual facts.

The point in all of this is that a person is actually safer keeping thought elevated to the true view of man rather than delving into the theories and material speculations of diagnoses.

3. It's claimed that Christian Scientists put their children in danger by withholding medicine or by not providing inoculations for the prevention of disease. Let me cite the authority of Dr. Robert Mendelsohn again. In his book, "How to Raise a Healthy Child in Spite of Your Doctor," he continually advises against the use of any drugs for children. This pertains to adults as well. In fact, he actually warns against them.

saying that there's no way of knowing what the side effects of such drugs may be. He says they may counteract one symptom but induce others and may even have long-range harmful effects. In case you're curious as to what Dr. Mendelsohn does recommend for the care of children, there's a story about him that sort of answers this. He was on a talk show and was warning against the use of drugs and other medical practices of pediatricians. The talk show host pressed him and said, "What kinds of remedies do you recommend, Dr. Mendelsohn?" He said the best remedies are the kind that your grandmother would have used, in other words, just simple, practical home care. Well, the next morning he was called into the office at the hospital, and his boss said to him, "Bob, we've decided to replace you. We've hired two grandmothers to take your place."

I cite this example not to support old-fashioned remedies but to indicate that there are experienced

voices warning against the use of drugs and inoculations. I'm sure the legislators are aware of some of the horror stories in connection with drugs that temper their decisions and lead them not to make iron-clad directives as to the compulsory use of drugs. However, they do face the pressures of commercial interests, pressures of the medical profession, and the public's fascination with technology. This produces the trend toward greater medical regimentation.

What can you and I do about this? Our primary responsibility is to see that we're not taken in by it. The public generally does believe that drugs heal or protect, and drugs certainly do seem to have an effect. How to explain this? Mrs. Eddy deals with this point in the chapter on Recapitulation. She says, "Then comes the question, how do drugs, hygiene, and animal magnetism heal?" She answers, "It may be affirmed that they do not heal, but only relieve suffering temporarily, exchanging one disease for another." (483:1-4)

Elsewhere in the textbook, she illustrates how the drug has only the power of the faith that is placed in it -- either the faith of the patient or the faith of the doctor and the world in general.

But regardless whether the effect comes from the chemical or from the thought, the result is that the patient's mentality is altered. This is the effect of drugs. Drugs require a mental consent. So if we don't give our consent, we can't be tempted or affected by them.

Mrs. Eddy made it clear that she believed in obeying the laws of the land. This was her response to a newspaper reporter. She said, "Where vaccination is compulsory, let your children be vaccinated, and see that your mind is in such a state that by your prayers vaccination will do the children no harm." She went on further to say, "So long as Christian Scientists obey the laws, I do not suppose their mental reservations will be thought to matter much. But every thought tells, and

Christian Science will overthrow false knowledge in the end." (My 344:30-6)

You would think that mankind would start learning some lessons in regard to drugs when they see the awful grip that mind-altering drugs have on millions and millions of people today -- the crime, the violence, and the disastrous results in people's lives. The influence toward drugs can be felt in something as subtle as the widespread advertisements for pain relievers promising relief from aches and colds. As Christian Scientists, we strive not to deaden our thoughts or alter them materially but to elevate them into the freedom of the truth of our Godlike identity.

So Christian Scientists, far from endangering people by refraining from drugs, are actually contributing to mankind's freedom by pointing up the benefit of spiritual awakening as the answer to health and safety.

4. The last point I want to mention is that people sometimes feel Christian Science parents put their children in danger by forcing them to follow an extreme, or they might even say fanatical, religion. It's surprising to you and me that people would group Christian Scientists with other religions that do tend to take extreme approaches. Our understanding of Christian Science is that it promotes cleanliness, balanced living habits, and great thoughtfulness in attitudes and actions.

This issue came up just recently when our Minnesota Committee on Publication was seeking an amendment to a bill regarding the health of children. One legislator mentioned a religious group that practices extreme punishments for its children in the name of their religion. The legislator was identifying the attitude of Christian Scientists toward health with the attitude of that group toward extreme punishment.

It makes one think of the accusation against Jesus after he had healed a dumb man, and the dumb man

spoke. Some people accused him of casting out the devil through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. This was the group that Jesus was lumped in with. Jesus explained the inconsistency of a house divided against itself, that is, evil casting out evil, and he concluded (Luke 11:20) "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you."

Jesus may have been maligned, misunderstood, attacked, identified with groups that were exactly the opposite of his own character. But the message he brought is the Truth. It healed and saved the people who accepted it then, it's continuing to heal and save the people who accept it now.

Our Committee on Publication patiently affirmed the reliability of the care that Christian Scientists exercise for their children and for themselves in practicing spiritual healing. The record does attest to this. The responsible lives of Christian Scientists continue to

attest to this. And even where others may not fully comprehend exactly what we think and do, they can feel the effect of our right thinking. This is where you and I can make our contribution and where we are making our contribution.

Our original question was, "What does God's law say to the statement, 'You may attend your church, but you may not practice your religion'." It seems to me that God's law is telling us: The practice of your religion goes on in your heart. It's your attitude, your trust, your understanding. Certain government laws may threaten or try to coerce, but, my friends, we are working for the freedom of humanity. What does God's law say to the efforts to restrict us? God's law is the law of divine Love. Divine Love blesses. Divine Love enlightens, comforts, heals, unites.

Even if unfair statutes are enacted, and we're all working to see that they won't be, the only real law of God is written in our hearts. That law will continue

affirming itself until it has brought everything into line with it.

All the misconceptions, all the material methods, all the sickness, sin, and death must yield to the law of Love, the law of Life, the law of Truth, the law of God. This is what you and I are working to achieve.