

Transcription

"God made me a *man*—not a *slave*."

Thus you have excommunicated me, on the charge of "disobeying both the laws of God and men," "in absconding from the service of my master, and refusing to return voluntarily."

I admit that I left my master (so called), and refused to return; but I deny that in this I disobeyed either the law of God, or any real *law* of men.

Look at my case. I was stolen and made a slave as soon as I was born. No man had any right to steal men. That manstealer who stole me trampled on my dearest rights. He committed an outrage on the law of God; therefore his manstealing gave him no right in me, and laid me under no obligation to be his slave. God made me a *man*—not a *slave*; and gave me the same right to myself that he gave the man who stole me to himself. The great wrongs he has done me, in stealing me and making me a slave, in compelling me to work for him many years without wages, and in holding me as merchandize,—these wrongs could never put me under obligation to stay with him, or to return voluntarily, when once escaped.

You charge me that, in escaping, I disobeyed God's law. No, indeed! That law which God wrote on the table of my heart, inspiring the love of freedom, and impelling me to seek it at every hazard, I obeyed; and, by the good hand of my God upon me, I walked out of the house of bondage.

I disobeyed no law of God revealed in the Bible. I read in Paul (1 Cor. 7 : 21), "But, if thou mayest be made free, use it rather." I read in Moses (Deut. 23: 15, 16), "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee. He shall dwell with thee, even among you in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best; thou shalt not oppress him." This implies my right to flee if I feel myself oppressed, and debars any man from delivering me again to my professed master.

I said I was stolen. God's Word declares, "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death." (Ex. 21 : 16.) Why did you not execute God's law on the man who stole me from my mother's arms? How is it that you trample down God's law against the *oppressor*, and wrest it to condemn me, the *innocent* and *oppressed*? Have you forgotten that the New Testament classes "manstealers" with "murderers of fathers" and "murderers of mothers," with "manslayers and whoremongers?" (1 Tim. 1 : 9, 10.)



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The advice you volunteered to send me, along with this sentence of excommunication, exhorts me, when I shall come to preach like Paul, to send every runaway home to his master, as he did Onesimus to Philemon. Yes, indeed I would, *if you would let me*. I should love to send them back *as he did*, "NOT NOW AS A SERVANT, but *above a servant*;—A BROTHER— a brother beloved—both *in the flesh* and in the Lord;" both a brother-man and a brother-Christian. Such a relation would be delightful—to be put on a level, in position, with Paul himself. "If thou count me, therefore, a *partner*, receive him *as myself*." I would to God that every fugitive had the privilege of returning to such a condition—to the embrace of *such a Christianity*—"not now as a servant, but above a servant,"—a "partner,"—even as Paul himself was to Philemon!

You charge me with disobeying the *laws of men*. I utterly deny that those things which outrage all right are laws. To be real laws, they must be founded in equity.

You have thrust me out of your church fellowship. So be it. You can do no more. You cannot exclude me from heaven; you cannot hinder my daily fellowship with God.

You have used your liberty of speech freely in exhorting and rebuking me. You are aware that I too am now where I may think for myself, and can use great freedom of speech, too, if I please. I shall therefore be only returning the favor of your exhortation if I exhort you to study carefully the golden rule, which reads, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Would you like to be *stolen*, and then *sold*? and then worked without wages? and forbidden to read the Bible? and be torn from your wife and children? and then, if you were able to make yourself free, and should, as Paul said, "*use it rather*," would you think it quite right to be cast out of the church for this? If it were done, so wickedly, would you be afraid God would indorse it? Suppose you were to put your soul in my soul's stead; how would *you* read the law of love?

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