

The School of Obedience

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1898

Fleming H. Revell Company New York

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5. THE ENTRANCE TO THE LIFE OF FULL OBEDIENCE

'Obedient unto death.' -Philippians 2:8.

After all that has been said on the life of obedience, I purpose speaking in this address of the entrance on that life.

You might think it a mistake to take this text, in which you have obedience in its very highest perfection, as our subject in speaking of the entrance on the course. But it is no mistake. The secret of success in a race is to have the goal clearly defined, and aimed at from the very outset.

'He... became obedient unto death.' There is no other CHRIST for any of us, no other obedience that pleases GOD, no other example for us to copy, no other Teacher from whom to learn to obey. Christians suffer inconceivably because they do not at once and heartily accept this as the only obedience they are to aim at.

The youngest Christian will find it a strength in the school of CHRIST to make nothing less from the commencement his prayer and his vow: **OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH**. It is at once the beauty and the glory of CHRIST. A share in it is the highest blessing He has to give. The desire for and the surrender to it is possible to the youngest believer.

If you want to be reminded of what it means, think of the story in ancient history. A proud king, with a great army following him, demands the submission of the king of a small but brave nation. When the ambassadors have delivered their message, he calls one of his soldiers to stab himself. At once he does it. A second is called; he too obeys at once. A third is summoned; he too is obedient to death.

'Go and tell your master that I have three thousand such men; let him come.'

The king dared count upon men who held their life not dear to them when the king's word called for it.

It is such obedience GOD wants. It is such obedience CHRIST gave. It is such obedience He teaches. Be it such obedience and nothing less we seek to learn. From the very outset of the Christian life let this be our aim, that we may avoid the fatal mistake of calling CHRIST Master and yet not doing what He says.

Let all who by these addresses have in any degree been convicted of the sin of disobedience, listen as we study from GOD's Word the way to escape from that and gain access to the life CHRIST can give - the entrance to the life of full obedience.

I. THE CONFESSION AND CLEANSING OF THE DISOBEDIENCE

It is easy to see that this must be the first step. In Jeremiah, the prophet who more than any other speaks of the disobedience of GOD's people, GOD says, *'Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord... for I am merciful... Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that... ye have not obeyed My voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord.'* (See Jeremiah 3:12-14)

As little as there can be pardon at conversion without confession can there be, after conversion, deliverance from the overcoming power of sin and the disobedience it brings, without a new and deeper conviction and confession.

The thought of our disobedience must not be a vague generality. The special things in which we actually disobey must be definitely found out, and in confession given up and placed in the hands of CHRIST, and by Him cleansed away. Then only can there be the hope of entering into the way of true obedience.

Let us search our life by the light of the teaching of our Lord.

1. CHRIST appealed to the law.

He was not come to destroy the law, but to secure its fulfillment. To the young ruler, He said, *'Thou knowest the commandments.'* Let the law be our first test.

Let us take a single sin - such as that of lying. I had a note from a young lady once saying that she wished to obey fully, and that she felt urged to confess an untruth she had told me. It was not a matter of importance, and yet she rightly judged that the confession would help her to cast it from her.

How much there is in ordinary society, how much in school life, too, that will not stand the test of strict truthfulness!

And so, there are other commandments, up to the very last, with its condemnation of all coveting and lusting after what is not ours, in which too frequently the Christian gives way to disobedience.

All this must come to a complete end. We must confess it, and in GOD's strength put it away forever, if there is to be any thought of our entering a life of full obedience.

2. CHRIST revealed the new law of love.

To be merciful as the Father in Heaven, to forgive just as He does, to love enemies and to do good to them that hate us, and to live lives of self-sacrifice and beneficence,- this was the religion JESUS taught on earth.

Let us look upon an unforgiving spirit when we are provoked or ill-used, upon unloving thoughts and sharp or unkind words, upon the neglect of the call to show mercy and do good and bless, all as so much disobedience, which must be felt and mourned over and plucked out like a right eye, ere the power of a full obedience can be ours.

3. CHRIST spoke much of self-denial.

Self is the root of all lack of love and obedience. Our Lord called His disciple to deny himself and to take up his cross; to forsake all, to hate and lose his own life, to humble himself and become the servant of all. He did so, because self, self-will, self-pleasing, self-seeking, is simply the source of all sin.

When we indulge the flesh in such a simple thing as eating and drinking; when we gratify self by seeking or accepting or rejoicing in what indulges our pride; when self-will is allowed to assert itself, and we make provision for the fulfillment of its desire, we are guilty of disobedience to His command. This gradually clouds the soul and makes the full enjoyment of His light and peace an impossibility.

4. CHRIST claimed for GOD the love of the heart.

For Himself He equally claimed the sacrifice of all to come and follow Him. The Christian who has not definitely at heart made this his aim, who has not determined to seek for grace so to live, is guilty of disobedience.

There may be much in his religion that appears good and earnest, but he cannot possibly have the joyful consciousness of knowing that he is doing the will of his Lord, and keeping His commandments.

When the call is heard to come and now begin anew a true life of obedience, there are many who feel the desire to do so, and try quietly to slip into it. They think that by more prayer and Bible study they will grow into it - it will gradually come. They are greatly mistaken. The word GOD uses in Jeremiah might teach them their mistake:

'Return, ye backsliding children... turn thou unto Me.'

A soul that is in full earnest and has taken the vow of full obedience may grow out of a feeble obedience into a fuller one. But there is no growing out of disobedience into obedience. A turning back, a turning away, a decision, a crisis, is needed. And that only comes by the very definite insight into what has been wrong, and its confession with shame and penitence. Then alone will the soul seek for that divine and mighty cleansing from all its filthiness which prepares for the consciousness of the gift of the new heart, and GOD's Spirit in it causing us to walk in His statutes.

If you would hope to lead a different life, to become a man or a woman of a Christlike obedience unto death, do begin by beseeching GOD for the HOLY SPIRIT of conviction, to show you all your disobedience and to lead you in humble confession to the cleansing GOD has provided. Rest not till you have received it.

II. FAITH THAT OBEDIENCE IS POSSIBLE.

This is the second step. To take that step we must try and understand clearly what obedience is.

1. To this end we must attend carefully to the difference between voluntary and involuntary sin. It is with the former alone that obedience deals.

We know that the new heart which GOD gives His child is placed in the midst of the flesh with its sinfulness. Out of this there often arises, even in one who is walking in true obedience, evil suggestions of pride, unlovingness, impurity, over which he has no direct control. They are in their nature utterly sinful and vile; but they are not imputed to a man as acts of transgression. They are not acts of disobedience, which he can break off and cast out, as he can the disobedience of which we have spoken. The deliverance from them comes in another way, not through the will of the regenerate man, by which obedience always comes, but through the cleansing power of the blood and the indwelling CHRIST. As the sinful nature rises, all he can do is to abhor it and trust in the blood that at once cleanses him and keeps him clean.

IT IS OF GREAT CONSEQUENCE

to note the distinction. It keeps the Christian from thinking obedience impossible. It encourages him to seek and offer his obedience in the sphere where it can avail. And it is just in proportion as in its own sphere the power of the will for obedience is maintained, that the power of the Spirit can be trusted and obtained to do the cleansing work in what is beyond the reach of the will.

2. When this difficulty has been removed, there is often a second one that arises, to make us doubt whether obedience be indeed possible.

Men connect it with the idea of absolute perfection. They put together all the commands of the Bible; they think of all the graces these commands point to, in their highest possible measure; and they think of a man with all those graces, every moment in their full perfection, as an obedient man.

How different is the demand of the Father in Heaven! He takes account of the different powers and attainments of each child of His. He asks of him only the obedience of each day, or rather, each hour at a time. He sees whether I have indeed chosen and given myself up to the whole-hearted performance of every known command. He sees whether I am really longing and learning to know and do all His will. And when His child does this, in simple faith and love, the obedience is acceptable.

The Spirit gives us the sweet assurance that we are well-pleasing to Him, and enables us to 'have confidence before GOD... because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.' (See I John 3:21-22)

This obedience is indeed an attainable degree of grace.

The faith that it is, is indispensable to the obedient walk.

You ask for the ground of that faith in GOD's Word? You find it in GOD's New Covenant promise, *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. I will put My fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from Me.* (Jeremiah 31:33; 32:40)

The great defect of the Old Covenant was that it demanded, but did not provide, the power for obedience. This the New Covenant did. The heart means the love, the life. The law put into, written into the heart, means that it has taken possession of the inmost life and love of the renewed man. The new heart delights in the law of GOD, it is willing and able to obey it.

You doubt this; your experience does not confirm it. No wonder! A promise of GOD is a thing of faith; you do not believe it, and so cannot experience it.

You know what invisible writing fluid is. You, write with it on paper, and nothing can be seen by a man who is not in the secret. Tell him of it, and by faith he knows it. Hold it up to the sun, or put some chemical on it, and out comes the secret writing. So GOD's law is written in your heart. If you believe this firmly, and come and say to GOD that His law is there in your inmost part, and hold up that heart to the light and heat of the HOLY SPIRIT, you will find it true. The law written in the heart will mean to you the fervent love of GOD's commands, with the power to obey them.

[In a volume being published about the same time, *The Two Covenants and the Second Blessing*, I have tried to show how plain, how certain, how all sufficient the provision is that has been made in the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace, for securing our obedience.]

A story is told of one of Napoleon's soldiers. The doctor was seeking to extract a bullet that had lodged in the region of the heart, when the soldier cried, 'Cut deeper, you will find Napoleon graven there.'

Christian! do believe that the law lives in your inmost being! Speak in faith the words of David and of CHRIST, *I delight to do Thy will, O my God! Yea, Thy law is within my heart.*'

The faith of this will assure you that obedience is possible. Such faith will help you into the life of true obedience.

III. THE STEP OUT OF DISOBEDIENCE TO OBEDIENCE IS BY SURRENDER TO CHRIST

'Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings,' GOD said to Israel.

They were His people, but had turned from Him; the return must be immediate and entire. To turn our back upon the divided life of disobedience, and in the faith of GOD's grace to say *'I will obey,'* may be the work of a moment.

The power for it, to take the vow and to maintain it, comes from the living CHRIST. We have said before, the power of obedience lies in the mighty influence of a living personal Presence. As

long as we took our knowledge of GOD's will from a book or from men, we could not but fail.

If we take JESUS, in His unchanging nearness, as at once our Lord and our Strength, we can obey. The voice that commands is the voice that inspires. The eye that guides is the eye that encourages. CHRIST becomes all in all to us; the Master who commands, the Example who teaches, the Helper who strengthens. Turn from your life of disobedience to CHRIST; give up yourself to Him in surrender and faith.

In surrender. Let Him have all. Give up your life to be as full of Him, of His presence, His will, His service, as He can make it. Give up yourself to Him, not to be saved from disobedience, that now you may be happy and live your own life without sinning and trouble. No; but that He may have you wholly for Himself, as a vessel, as a channel, which He can fill with Himself, with His life and love for men, and me in His blessed service.

In faith too. In a new faith. When a soul sees this new thing in CHRIST, the power for continual obedience, it needs a new faith to take in the special blessing of His great redemption. The faith that only understood '*He... became obedient unto death*' of His atonement, as a motive to love and obedience, now learns to take the word as Scripture speaks it, '***Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who... humbled Himself, and became obedient even unto death.***' It believes that CHRIST has put His own mind and Spirit into us, and in the faith of that, prepares to live and act it out.

GOD sent CHRIST into the world to restore obedience to its place in our heart and life, to restore man to His place in the obedience to GOD. CHRIST came, and becoming obedient unto death proved what the only true obedience is. He wrought it out, and perfected it in Himself, as a life that He won through death, and now communicates to us.

The CHRIST who loves us, who leads and teaches and strengthens us, who lives in us, is the CHRIST who was obedient unto death. '*Obedient unto death*' is the very essence of the life He imparts. Shall we not accept it and trust Him to manifest it in us?

Would you enter into the blessed life of obedience? See here the open gate-CHRIST says, '***I am the door.***' See here the new and living way-CHRIST says, '***I am the way.***'

We begin to see it; all our disobedience was owing to our not knowing CHRIST aright. We see it; obedience is only possible in a life of unceasing fellowship with Himself. The inspiration of His voice, the light of His eyes, the grasp of His hand make it possible, make it certain.

Come and let us bow down, and yield ourselves to this CHRIST. Obedient unto death, in the faith that He makes us partakers with Himself of all He is and has.

~ end of chapter 5 ~
