

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Preface	7
1. Obedience: Its Place in Holy Scripture	9
2. The Obedience of Christ	23
3. The Secret of True Obedience	37
4. The Morning Watch in the Life of Obedience	51
5. The Entrance to the Life of Full Obedience	65
6. The Obedience of Faith	79
7. The School of Obedience	91
8. Obedience to the Last Command	105
Appendix A: Note on the Morning Watch	119
Appendix B: Man's Questions, God's Answers	125

1

Obedience: Its Place in Holy Scripture

Have not I commanded thee? JOSHUA 1:9

IN UNDERTAKING THE STUDY of a Bible word or of a truth of the Christian life, it is a great help to take a survey of the place it takes in Scripture. As we see where and how often and in what connections it is found, its relative importance may be apprehended as well as its bearing on the whole of revelation. Let me try in the first chapter to prepare the way for the study of what obedience is by showing you where to go in God's Word to find the mind of God concerning it.

TAKE SCRIPTURE AS A WHOLE

We begin with paradise. In Genesis 2:16, we read: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying." And later (3:11), "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"

Note how obedience to the command is the one virtue of paradise, the one condition of man's abiding there, the one thing his Creator asks of him. Nothing is said of faith or humility or love; obedience includes all. The demand for obedience as the one thing that is to decide his destiny is as supreme as the claim and authority of God. In the life of man, to obey is the one thing needful.

Turn now from the beginning to the close of the Bible. In its last chapter you read (Rev 22:14), "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life." Or, if we accept the American Standard Version, which gives another reading, we have the same thought in chapters 12 and 14, where we read of the seed of the woman (12:17), "that keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus"; and of the patience of the saints (14:12), "Here . . . [are] they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

From beginning to end, from paradise lost to paradise regained, the law is unchangeable; it is only obedience that gives access to the tree of life and the favor of God.

And if you ask how the change was effected out of the disobedience at the beginning that closed the way to the tree of life, to the obedience at the end that again gained entrance

to it, turn to that which stands midway between the beginning and the end: the cross of Christ. Read a passage like Romans 5:19 (ASV), "Through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous"; or Philippians 2:8-9, "He became obedient unto death . . . Wherefore God . . . hath highly exalted him"; or Hebrews 5:8-9, "He . . . learned . . . obedience . . . and . . . became the author of . . . salvation unto all them that obey him," and you see how the whole redemption of Christ consists in restoring obedience to its place. The beauty of His salvation consists in this: that He brings us back to the life of obedience, through which alone the creature can give the Creator the glory due to Him, or receive the glory of which his Creator desires to make him partaker.

Paradise, Calvary, heaven, all proclaim with one voice: "Child of God, the first and the last thing thy God asks of thee is simple, universal, unchanging obedience."

TURN TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Let us especially notice in the Old Testament how, with any new beginning in the history of God's Kingdom, obedience always comes into special prominence.

1. Take Noah, the new father of the human race, and you will find four times written (Gen

6:22; 7:5, 9, 16), "According to all that God commanded him [Noah], so did he."

It is the man who does what God commands to whom God can entrust His work, whom God can use to be a savior of men.

2. Think of Abraham, the father of the chosen race. "By faith Abraham . . . obeyed" (Heb 11:7).

When he had been forty years in this school of faith-obedience, God came to perfect his faith and to crown it with His fullest blessing. Nothing could fit him for this but a crowning act of obedience. When he had bound his son on the altar, God came and said (Gen 22:16-18), "By myself have I sworn . . . in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed . . . in thy seed shall all nations . . . be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

And to Isaac He spake (Gen 26:3-5), "I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham . . . because that Abraham obeyed my voice."

Oh, when shall we learn how unspeakably pleasing obedience is in God's sight, and how unspeakable is the reward He bestows upon it! The way to be a blessing to the world is to be men of obedience, known by God and the world by this one mark: a will utterly given up to God's will. Let all who profess to walk in Abraham's footsteps walk thus.

3. Go on to Moses. At Sinai, God gave him the

message to the people (Ex 19:5), “If ye will obey my voice indeed, . . . ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.”

In the very nature of things it cannot be otherwise. God’s holy will is His glory and perfection; it is only by an entrance into His will, by obedience, that it is possible to be His people.

4. Take the building of the sanctuary in which God was to dwell. In the last three chapters of Exodus you have part or all of the expression nineteen times, “According to all the LORD commanded Moses, so did he.” And then, “The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (40:34). Just so, again in Leviticus 8 and 9, you have, with reference to the consecration of the priests and the tabernacle, the same expression twelve times. And then, “The glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed . . . the burnt offering” (9:23-24).

Words cannot make it plainer that it is amid what the obedience of His people has wrought that God delights to dwell, that it is the obedient He crowns with His favor and presence.

5. After the forty years wandering in the wilderness and its terrible revelation of the fruit of disobedience, there was again a new beginning when the people were about to enter Canaan. Read Deuteronomy, with all Moses spoke in

sight of the land, and you will find there is no book of the Bible which uses the word "obey" so frequently or speaks so much of the blessing obedience will assuredly bring. The whole is summed up in the words, "I set before you . . . a blessing, if ye obey . . . and a curse, if ye will not obey" (11:26-28).

Yes, "a blessing, if ye obey"! That is the keynote of the blessed life. Canaan, just like paradise and heaven, can be the place of blessing, even as it is the place of obedience. Would God we might take it in! But do beware of praying only for a blessing. Let us care for the obedience; God will care for the blessing. Let my one thought as a Christian be how I can obey and please my God perfectly.

6. The next new beginning we have is in the appointment of kings in Israel. In the story of Saul we have the most solemn warning as to the need of exact and entire obedience in a man whom God is to trust as ruler of His people. Samuel had commanded Saul (1 Sa 10:8) to wait seven days for him to come and sacrifice and to show him what to do. When Samuel delayed (13:8-14), Saul took it upon himself to offer the sacrifice.

When Samuel came, he said: "Thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee . . . thy kingdom shall

not continue . . . because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.”

God will not honor the man who is not obedient.

Saul has a second opportunity given him to show what is in his heart. He is sent to execute God’s judgment against Amelek. He obeys. He gathers an army of 200,000 men, undertakes the journey into the wilderness, and destroys Amelek. But while God had commanded him to “utterly destroy all . . . and spare them not” (15:3), he spares the best of the cattle and Agag.

God speaks to Samuel, “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he . . . hath not performed my commandments” (v. 11).

When Samuel comes, Saul twice over says, “I have performed the commandment of the LORD” (v. 13); “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD” (v. 20).

And so he had, as many would think. But his obedience had not been entire. God claims exact, full obedience. God had said, “Utterly destroy all! Spare . . . not!” This he had not done. He had spared the best sheep for a sacrifice unto the Lord. And Samuel said, “To obey is better than [any] sacrifice . . . Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee” (vv. 22-23).

That is a sad type of so much obedience which

in part performs God's commandment and yet is not the obedience God asks! God says of all sin and all disobedience: "Utterly destroy all! Spare ... not!" May God reveal to us whether we are indeed going all lengths with Him, seeking utterly to destroy all and spare nothing that is not in perfect harmony with His will. It is only a wholehearted obedience, down to the minutest details, that can satisfy God. Let nothing less satisfy you, lest while we say, "I have obeyed," God says, "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord."

7. Just one word more from the Old Testament. Next to Deuteronomy, Jeremiah is the book most full of the word "obey," though, alas, mostly in connection with the complaint that the people had not obeyed. God sums up all His dealings with the fathers in the one word: "I spake not unto your fathers ... concerning ... sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God" (7:22-23).

Would God that we could learn that all that God speaks of sacrifices, even of the sacrifice of His beloved Son, is subordinate to the one thing: to have His creature restored to full obedience. Into all the inconceivable meaning of the word, "I will be your God," there is no gateway but this: "Obey my voice."

COME TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. In the New Testament we think at once of our blessed Lord and the prominence He gives to obedience as the one thing for which He was come into the world. He who entered it with His "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10:9), ever confessed to men, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (Jn 5:30).

Of all He did and of all He suffered, even to the death, He said, "This commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn 10:18).

If we turn to His teaching, we find everywhere that the obedience He rendered is what He claims from everyone who would be His disciple.

During His whole ministry, from beginning to end, obedience is the very essence of salvation. In the Sermon on the Mount He began with it. No one could enter the Kingdom "but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mt 7:21). And in the farewell discourse, how wonderfully He reveals the spiritual character of true obedience as it is born of love and inspired by it, and as it also opens the way into the love of God. Do take into your heart the wonderful words (Jn 14:15, 16-17, 21, 23, ASV), "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments. And . . . the Father . . .

shall give you the Spirit. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he . . . shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

No words could express more simply or more powerfully the inconceivably glorious place Christ gives to obedience, with its twofold possibility: (1) as only possible to a loving heart, (2) as making possible all that God has to give of His Holy Spirit, of His wonderful love, of His indwelling in Christ Jesus. I know of no passage in Scripture that gives a higher revelation of the spiritual life, or the power of loving obedience as its one condition. Let us pray and ask God very earnestly that by His Holy Spirit its light may transfigure our daily obedience with its heavenly glory.

See how all this is confirmed in the next chapter. How well we know the parable of the vine! How often and how earnestly we have asked how to be able to abide continually in Christ! We have thought of more study of the Word, more faith, more prayer, more communion with God, and we have overlooked the simple truth that Jesus teaches so clearly, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love,” with its

divine sanction. "Even as I kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

For Him as for us, the only way under heaven to abide in divine love is to keep the commandments. Do let me ask: Have you known it, have you heard it preached, have you believed it and proved it true in your experience that obedience on earth is the key to a place in God's love in heaven? Unless there be some correspondence between God's wholehearted love in heaven and our wholehearted, loving obedience on earth, Christ cannot manifest Himself to us, God cannot abide in us, we cannot abide in His love.

2. If we go on from our Lord Jesus to His apostles, we find in Acts two words of Peter's which show how our Lord's teaching had entered into him. In the one, "The Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Ac 5:32), he proves how he knew what had been the preparation for Pentecost, the surrender to Christ. In the other, "We must obey God rather than man" (Ac 5:29, ASV), we have the manward side. Obedience is to be unto death; nothing on earth dare or can hinder it in the man who has given himself to God.

3. In Paul's Epistle to the Romans, we have in the opening and closing verses, the expression, "the obedience of faith among all the nations" (1:5, ASV; cf. 16:26), as that for which he was

made an apostle. He speaks of what God had wrought "to make the Gentiles obedient" (15:18). He teaches that, as the obedience of Christ makes us righteous, we become the servants of obedience unto righteousness. As disobedience in Adam and in us was the one thing that wrought death, so obedience, in Christ and in us, is the one thing that the Gospel makes known as the way of restoration to God and His favor.

4. We all know how James warns us not to be hearers of the Word only but doers, and expounds how Abraham was justified, and his faith perfected by his works.

5. In Peter's first epistle we have only to look at the first chapter to see the place obedience has in his system. In verses 1-2 he speaks to the "Elect . . . in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood Jesus Christ," and so points us to obedience as the eternal purpose of the Father, as the great object of the work of the Spirit, and a chief part of the salvation of Christ. He writes, "As children of obedience" (v. 14, ASV), born of it, marked by it, subject to it, "be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (v. 15). Obedience is the very starting point of true holiness. In verse 22 (ASV) we read, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth." The whole acceptance of the truth of God

was not merely a matter of intellectual assent or strong emotion; it was a subjection of the life to the dominion of the truth of God. The Christian life was in the first place obedience.

6. Of John we know how strong his statements are. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar" (1 Jn 2:4). Obedience is the one certificate of Christian character. "Let us . . . love . . . in deed and in truth . . . hereby we . . . shall assure our hearts before him. . . . And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 Jn 3:18-22). Obedience is the secret of a good conscience and of the confidence that God heareth us. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 Jn 5:3). The obedience that keeps His commandments is the garment in which the hidden, invisible love reveals itself, and whereby it is known.

Such is the place obedience has in Holy Scripture, in the mind of God, in the hearts of His servants. We may well ask, Does it take that place in my heart and life? Have we indeed given obedience that supreme place of authority over us that God means it to have, as the inspiration of every action and of every approach to Him? If we yield ourselves to the searching of God's Spirit, we may find that we never gave it its true propor-

tion in our scheme of life, and that this lack is the cause of all our failure in prayer and in work. We may see that the deeper blessings of God's grace and the full enjoyment of God's love and nearness, have been beyond our reach simply because obedience was never made what God would have it be: the starting point and the goal of our Christian life.

Let this, our first study, waken in us an earnest desire to know God's will fully concerning this truth. Let us unite in praying that the Holy Spirit may show us how defective the Christian's life is where obedience does not rule all, how that life can be exchanged for one of full surrender to absolute obedience, and how sure it is that God in Christ will enable us to live it out.