

God has shown us in his word how he regards different characters, and it is according to the revealed mind and judgment of God that our judgment is to be formed. Now the word of God plainly separates those that do his will from all others, takes them out, sets them apart, and treats them as distinct, placing God's obedient servants by themselves on the one side, and all the rest of mankind on the other. On the one hand there is a likeness both of state and character, between all the obedient, which no outward differences can do away; on the other, there is a difference between the obedient and disobedient which no outward likeness can reconcile. They that "do the will of God" are distinguished from all besides. The expression in the text is yet more general: "Whosoever shall do the will of God." Whosoever or whatsoever he may be in other respects, high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, he is classed with all the rest who do God's will, and placed apart from the rest of mankind.

This is very different from man's way of distinguishing one man from another. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." For instance, those to whom God has given much of this world's wealth are generally called "the rich," while those who have small earthly possessions are classed together as "the poor;" yet there may be the greatest possible difference among those thus classed together; the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who do his will and those who do it not. Be it our chief care that whatever our outward condition may be, He may recognise us now as those that do his will, and acknowledge us as such hereafter when the final separation shall be made!

It is not the knowledge of the will of God, or a mere profession of obedience, or a great reputation for holiness, or all of these together, that constitute the character mentioned in the text; it is to do the will of God, in other words to be true and practical Christians. And even this obedience must spring from a right source, or it will not be obedience in the eye of the Almighty. Nothing that we can do will be pleasing to God, unless it spring from faith in Christ. We must be reconciled before we can hope to please; we must first obey the Gospel call to believe in Christ for the pardon of sin before we can hope to render to God any acceptable obedience in keeping his commandments. "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the

name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandment." First, Christ must be believed on with the heart, and then must follow the fruits of holiness.

Perhaps to some sincere but fearful disciple of Christ these words of the text may come with a discouraging and depressing effect, "Whosoever shall do the will of God." He is sadly conscious that he does not do that will. He does indeed earnestly desire to do it, but this very desire makes him feel his manifold defects, and he echoes the apostle's complaint, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." But our Saviour's words were never meant to discourage any disciple; they are the words of affectionate blessing and encouragement, conveying a privilege, not pronouncing a condemnation; shutting out indeed all insincere professors, but speaking nothing but comfort to the true disciple. For did not Christ know the weakness and imperfections of his followers? Could he mean when he gave this assurance to confine it to those who should do the will of God perfectly? Where can such be found? Was there one such among those to whom these words were directly addressed? No; but there were those who believed on him, loved him, and sincerely desired to follow him; and to such his words were and are addressed. The very imperfections of the first followers of Christ may be an encouragement to us if we view them aright. Look at their character at the time when our Lord spoke thus to them; consider their weakness and instability, their darkness, ignorance, and unbelief. Yet they had forsaken all and followed him, and so they received this blessing. "And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!" The blessing was pronounced on them directly and personally, and it is extended to others in the words that follow: "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and mother."

Does your heart testify that you are sincere and honest in your desire to do the will of God? Have you fled to the cross of Christ for refuge? Are you resting your hope in him, striving by the Spirit to follow him? Then let not your own unworthiness make you conclude that you cannot be of those who do the will of God. Rather believe that God for Christ's sake accepts your sincere though imperfect obedience, and blesses and will bless you.