

OBEDIENCE — THE SAINTS' LIBERTY.

HEBREWS XIII. 17-25.

The spirit of obedience is the secret of all godliness. The spring of all evil from the beginning has been independence of will. Obedience is the only rightful state of the creature, or God would cease to be supreme—would cease to be God. Wherever there is independence, *there* is always sin.

This rule, if always remembered, would wonderfully help us in guiding our conduct.

There is no case whatever in which we ought to do our own will; for then we have not the capacity either of judging rightly about our conduct, or of bringing it before God.

I may be called upon to act independently of the highest authority in the world, but it ought never to be on the principle that I am doing my own will, which is the principle of eternal death. The liberty of the saint is not license to do his own will.

An entire self-renunciation (and this goes very far when we know the subtlety of the heart) is the only means of walking with the full blessing that belongs to our happy position of service to God, our brethren and mankind.

If anything could have taken away the liberty of the Lord Jesus, it would have been the hindering

Him in being always obedient to the will of God. All that moves in the sphere of man's will is sin. Christianity pronounces the assertion of its exercise to be the principle of sin. We are sanctified unto obedience (1 Pet. i. 7) : *the essence of sanctification is the having no will of our own*. If I were as wise (so to speak) as Lucifer, and it administered to my own will, all my wisdom would become folly. True slavery, is the being enslaved by our own will; and true liberty consists in our having our own wills entirely set aside. When we are doing our own wills, *self* is the centre.

The Lord Jesus "took upon himself the form of a servant" and "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 7, 8.) When man became a sinner, he ceased to be a servant, though he is in sin and rebellion, the slave of a mightier rebel than himself. When we are sanctified we are brought into the place of servants as well as sons. The spirit of sonship just manifested itself in Jesus, in doing the Father's will. Satan sought to make His sonship at variance with unqualified obedience to God: but the Lord Jesus would never do anything, from the beginning to the end of His life, but His Father's will.

In this chapter the spirit of obedience is enforced towards those who rule in the church, "Obey them that have the rule over you," (v. 17.) It is for our profit in everything, to seek after this spirit. "They watch for your souls," says the Apostle, "as

those that must give account." Those whom the Lord puts into service He makes responsible to Himself. This is the real secret of all true service. It should not be right that guides, either those who rule, or those who obey. They are servants, and this is their responsibility. Woe unto them if they do not guide, direct, rebuke, etc.; if they do not do it, the Lord will require it of them. On the other hand, those counselled become directly responsible to "the Lord" for obedience.

The great guardian principle of all conduct in the Church of God is *personal* responsibility to "the Lord."

No guidance of another can ever come in between an individual's conscience and God. In Popery this individual responsibility to God is taken away. Those who are spoken of in this chapter, as having the rule in the church, had to "give account" of *their own conduct*, and not of the souls which were committed to them. There is no such thing as giving account of other people's souls: "every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." (Rom. xiv.) Individual responsibility always secures the maintenance of God's authority. If those who watched for their souls had been faithful in their service, they would not have to give account "with grief," so far as they were concerned; but still it might be very "unprofitable" for the others if they acted disobediently.

Wherever the principle of obedience is not in our hearts, all is wrong, there is nothing but sin. The

principle which actuates us in our conduct should never be, "I must do what I think right;" but "I ought to obey God." (Acts v. 29.)

The Apostle then says, "pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly," (ver. 18.) *It is always the snare of those who are occupied with things of God continually not to have a "good conscience."* No person is so liable to a fall, as one who is continually administering the truth of God, *if he be not careful to maintain a "good conscience."* The continually talking about truth, and the being occupied with other people, has a tendency to harden the conscience. The Apostle does not say "pray for us, for we are labouring hard," and the like, but that which gives him confidence in asking their prayers is, that he has a "good conscience." Where there is not diligence in seeking to maintain a "good conscience" Satan comes in and destroys confidence between the soul and God, or we get into false confidence. Where there is the sense of the presence of God, there is the spirit of lowly obedience. The moment that a person is very active in service, or has much knowledge and is put forward in any way in the Church, there is the danger of not having a "good conscience."

It is blessed to see the way in which in verses 20 and 21 the Apostle returns after all his exercise and trial of spirit, to the thought of God's being the "God of peace." He was taken from them, and was in bondage and trial himself; he enters more-

over into all the troubles of these saints, and is extremely anxious evidently about it. And yet he is able to turn quietly to God, as the "God of peace." We are called to peace. Paul closes his second epistle to the Thessalonians with, "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means." There is nothing that the soul of the believer is more brought to feel, than that he has "need of patience." (Heb. x. 36.) But if he is hindered by anything from finding God to be "the God of peace," if sorrow and trial hinder this, there is the will of the flesh at work. There cannot be the quiet doing of God's will, if the mind be troubled and fluttered about a thousand things. It is completely our privilege to walk and to be settled, in peace; to have no uneasiness with God, but to be quietly seeking His will. It is impossible to have holy clearness of mind, unless God be known as the "God of peace." When everything was removed out of God's sight but Christ, God was the "God of peace."

Suppose then that I find out, that I am an utterly worthless sinner, but see the Lord Jesus standing in the presence of God, I have perfect peace. This sense of peace becomes quite distracted when we are looking at the ten thousand difficulties by the way; for, when the charge and care of anything rests on our minds, God ceases *practically* to be the "God of peace."

There are three steps:

1st. The knowledge that Christ has "made peace"

through the blood of the cross." (Col. i. 20.) This gives us "peace with God." (Rom. v. 1.)

2nd. As regards all our cares and troubles, the promise is, that, if we cast them on God, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (See Phil. iv. 6, 7.) God burdens Himself about everything for us, yet He is never disturbed or troubled; and it is said, that His peace shall "keep our hearts and minds." If Jesus walked on the troubled sea, He was just as much at peace as ever; He was far above the waves and billows.

3rd. There is a further step, namely, He who is the "God of peace" being with us, and working in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. (See vers. 20, 21.) The holy power of God is here described as keeping the soul in those things which are well pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ.

There was war—war with Satan, and in our own consciences. That met its crisis on the cross of the Lord Jesus. The moment He was raised from the dead, God was made known fully as the "God of peace." He could not leave His Son in the grave; the whole power of the enemy was exercised to its fullest extent; and God brought into the place of peace the Lord Jesus, and us also who believe on Him, and became nothing less than the "God of peace."

He is "the God of peace," both as regards our sins and as regards our circumstances. *But it is only in His presence that there is settled peace.* The

moment we get into human thoughts and reasonings about circumstances, we get troubled. Not only has peace been made for us by the atonement, but it rests upon the power of Him who raised up Jesus again from the dead ; and therefore we know Him as the " God of peace."

The blessing of the saint does not depend upon the old covenant to which man was a party, and which might therefore fail ; but upon that God who, through all the trouble and sea and the power of Satan, " brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus " and thus secured " eternal redemption." (Heb. ix. 12.)

All that God Himself had pronounced as to judgment against sin, and all the wicked power of Satan, rested on Jesus on the cross ; and God Himself has raised Him from the dead. Here then we have full comfort and confidence of soul. " Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," argues faith, (see Rom. viii. 31-39), for, when all our sins had been laid upon Jesus, God stepped in, in mighty power, and " brought again from the dead that Great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." The blood was as much the proof and witness of the love of God to the sinner as it was of the justice and majesty of God against sin. This covenant is founded on the truth and holiness of the eternal God having been fully met and answered in the cross of the Lord Jesus. His precious blood has met every claim of God. If God be not

the "God of peace," He must be asserting the insufficiency of the blood of His dear Son. And this we know is impossible. God rests in it as a sweet savour.

Then as to the effect of all this on the life of the saint, *the knowledge of it produces fellowship with God and delight in doing His will.* He "works in us," as it is said here, "that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ."

The only thing that ought to make any hesitation in the saint's mind about departing to be with Christ is the doing God's will here. We may suppose such an one thinking of the joy of being with Christ, and then being arrested by the desire of doing God's will here, (see Phil. i. 20-25.) That assumes confidence in God, as the "God of peace," and confidence in His sustaining power whilst here. If the soul is labouring in the turmoil of its own mind, it cannot have the blessing of knowing God as "the God of peace." The flesh is so easily aroused, that there is often the need of the word of exhortation, "I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation," (ver 22.)

The spirit of obedience is the only spirit of holiness.
The Lord give us grace to walk in His ways.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord,"

—Psalm xxxvii. 5.

"Commit thy works unto the Lord,"

—Prov. xvi. 3.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord."

—Psalm lv. 22.

CHRIST AS OUR FOOD.

JOSHUA V.

I would say a word as to the way in which Christ may be considered as our food. He may be looked at as the food of the Christian in three ways: First, as a redeemed sinner; secondly, in connection with sitting in heavenly places in Christ; and thirdly, as a pilgrim and stranger down here. But this last is merely accessory and not the proper portion of the Christian.

The Lord said to Israel that He had come down to deliver them from Egypt and bring them into the land of Canaan.

He did not say a word about the wilderness when He came to deliver them from Egypt, because His interference for them there was in the power of redemption and for the accomplishing of His promises. However, there was the wilderness as well as redemption from Egypt and the entrance into Canaan; and Christ answers as our food to these three things. Two of them are permanent, for we are nourished by Christ in two ways permanently, that is, in redemption and glory. The third way is as the manna which we have all along the road. It is in these three ways that Christ meets His people and nourishes them all the way. Two of them remain, as we have seen, but the third ceases when the circumstances it was to meet have passed away. They did eat the passover and the manna until they got into the land, then the manna ceased; but

they continued to eat the passover.

Now there are two ways in which it is proper for us ever to be feeding on Christ. First as the passover, for they ate the paschal lamb when the wilderness had ceased and Egypt had been long left behind. When in Egypt, the blood was on the lintel and the door-posts, and the Israelites ate of the lamb inside the house. The thought they had while they were eating was, that God was going through the land as an avenging judge; and the effect of the blood on the door-posts was to keep God out, which was a great thing to do, for it brought into God's presence as a Judge. Woe unto him in whom sin is found. The state of the one who now eats of Christ is just according as he estimates the value of the cross, through fear of what sin actually merits.

When we have got into *the effect* of the blood of the paschal Lamb, we have got into Canaan and enjoy the peace of the land as a redeemed people, having crossed the Jordan—not only the Red Sea. That is, we have passed through death and resurrection; not as knowing Christ dead and risen *for us* merely, as presented in the Red Sea, but as being *dead with Him and entered into heavenly places with Him*, as in Jordan. Then the character of God is known as *their God*, that is as the accomplisher of all that which he purposed towards them. It is not keeping God out now, but it is enjoying His love; not looking at God as in the cross pouring out wrath in judgment against sin.

In Jesus on the cross there was perfect justice and perfect love. What devotedness to the Father and what tender love to us! And this is the way the saint who is in peace feeds on the cross. It is not feeding on it as knowing that he is safe; for Israel's keeping the passover after they got into Canaan was very different from their keeping it when judgment was passing over. In Canaan they were in peace, and they were able to glorify God in this way, in the remembrance of their redemption from Egypt.

In this type we see presented, not the sinner that feels he is safe, but the saint that can glorify God in his affections; his heart confidently flowing out to Him, and feeding on Christ as the old corn of the land—the second Adam, the Lord from heaven.

We see Christ now by faith at the right hand of God as the glorified man, not merely as Son of God, but as Son of Man. As Stephen, when the heavens were opened to him, beheld Jesus at the right hand of God. We also see Him up there. We do not see Him as He is represented in the Revelation, seated on a white horse, coming forth out of heaven. He will indeed come forth and receive us up where He is, and we shall be like Him and be for ever with Him. But we shall feed on Him as the old corn of the land when we are there, and this is our proper portion now; manna is *not our portion*, though it is our *provision* by the way.

Joshua sees Jehovah as the Captain of Jehovah's host, and Israel feeds in the land before they fight.

And our portion is to sit down in it before we fight, because God has given it to us. They do not eat the manna in Canaan, because it is for the wilderness. The manna is not Christ in the heavens! it is Christ down here. It is not our portion; our portion is the old corn of the land. That is, the whole thing, according to God's counsels, is redemption and glory. But all our life is exercise down here, *or sin*, (excepting that God has given us moments of joy), because while here there is nothing but what acts on the flesh, or gives occasion for service to God. We may fail, and then Christ comes and feeds us with the manna, that is, His sympathy with us down here, and shows how His grace is applied to all the circumstances of our daily life, and that is a happy thing. For most of the time, the far greater part of our life, we are occupied in these things, necessary and lawful things no doubt, but not occupied with heavenly joy in Christ. And these things are apt to turn away the heart from the Lord, and hinder our joy. But if we would have our appetites feed on Him as the old corn of the land, we must have the habit of feeding on Him as the manna. For instance, something may make me impatient during the day, well then, Christ is my patience, and thus He is the manna to sustain me in patience. He is the source of grace; not only the example which I am to copy. He is more than this, for I am to draw strength from Him, to feed upon Him daily; for we need Him, and it is impossible to enjoy Him as the paschal Lamb, un-

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less we are also feeding on Him as the manna.

We learn that God delights in Christ and He gives us a capacity to enjoy Him too. To have such affections is the highest possible privilege, but to enjoy Him, *we must feed on Him every day*. It is to know Christ come down to bring the needed grace and turn the dangerous circumstances with which we are surrounded, to the occasion of feeding on Himself as the manna to sustain us, and strengthen us in our trial.

ON THE WATER OF SEPARATION.

• NUMBERS XIX.

But if, on the one hand, priesthood must lead the people through the wilderness, and if Moses' rod of authority cannot do this, it can only smite; on the other, there must be a provision connected with it for the removing of the defilements taking place during the journey, that the communion of the people with God may not be interrupted. That is why the sacrifice of the Heifer is placed here, apart from all the others, because it was prescribed in order to meet the defilements of the wilderness.

But if the consideration of Christ (even though it was Christ offered for sin, and the participation in His priestly work, in connection with that sacrifice), was a most holy thing realized in the communion of the most holy place; being occupied with that sin, even in a brother, and that to purify him, defiled those who were not guilty of it.

These are the subjects of chapter xix. What follows is the ordinance given on this occasion. To touch a dead body was indeed being defiled with sin; for sin is here considered under the point of view of defilement which prescribed the entrance into the court of the tabernacle. Christ is presented in the Red Heifer as unspotted by sin and as never having borne the yoke of it either, but He is led forth without the camp, as being wholly a sacrifice for sin. The priest who brought the Heifer did not kill it; but it was killed in his presence. He was there to take knowledge of the deed.

The death of Christ is never the act of priesthood. The heifer was completely burned, without the camp, even its blood, except that which was sprinkled directly before the tabernacle of the congregation, that is, where the people were to meet God. There the blood was sprinkled seven times, (because it was there that God met with His people), a perfect testimony in the eyes of God to the atonement made for sin. They had access there according to the value of this blood. The priest threw into the fire cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet, (that is, all that was of man, and his human glory in the world). "From the cedar down to the hyssop," is the expression of nature, from her highest elevation to her lowest depths. Scarlet is external glory, (the world, if you please). The whole was burnt in the fire which consumed Christ, the sacrifice for sin.

Then, if anybody contracted defilement, though

it were merely from neglect, in whatever way it might be, God took account of the defilement. And this is a solemn and important fact; God provides for cleansing, but in no case can tolerate anything in His presence unsuited to it. It might seem hard in an inevitable case, as one dying suddenly in the tent. But it was to show that for *His* presence God judges of what is suited to His presence. The man was defiled and he could not go into God's tabernacle.

To cleanse the defiled person, they took some running water, into which they put the ashes of the heifer, and the man was sprinkled on the third and on the seventh days; then he was clean; signifying that the Spirit of God, without applying anew the blood to the soul, (that in the type had been sprinkled once for all when the people met God), takes the sufferings of Christ, (the proof that sin and all that is of the natural man and of this world have been consumed for us in His expiatory death), and applies them to it.

It is the proof, *the intimate conviction, that nothing is nor can be imputed.* It was in this respect wholly done away in the sacrifice, whose ashes, (the witness that it was consumed) are now applied.

But it produces upon the heart the deeply painful conviction that it has got defiled, *notwithstanding redemption*, and by the sins for which Christ has suffered in accomplishing it. We have found our will and pleasure, if only for a moment, in what was *the cause of His pain*; and this in the face of

His sufferings for sin, but alas! in forgetfulness of them—even for that sin, the motions of which we yield to so lightly now; a feeling much deeper than that of having sins imputed. For it is in reality the new man, in his best feelings, who judges by the Spirit and according to God, and who takes knowledge of the sufferings of Christ and of sin, as seen in Him on the cross. The first feeling is bitterness, although without the thought of imputation—bitterness, precisely because there is no imputation, and that we have sinned against love as well as against holiness, and that we must submit to that conviction.

But lastly, (and it seems to me it is the reason why there was the second sprinkling) it is the consciousness of that love, and of the deep grace of Jesus, and the joy of being perfectly clean through the work of that love. The first part of the cleansing was in the sense of the horror of sinning against such grace; the second, the mind quite cleared from it by the abounding of grace over the sin. Here it is *the practical restoration of the soul inwardly*. There is no sprinkling with blood; the purifying is *by water*. Christ's death being fully brought in, in its power by the Holy Ghost. The details shew the exactness of God, as to those defilements, though He cleanses us from them.

They shew too, that any one who has to do with the sin of another, though it be in the way of duty to cleanse it, *is defiled*, not as the guilty person, it is true, but we cannot touch sin without being defiled. The value of grace and priesthood is also made evident.