

"Elect . . . unto obedience"

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It is a fact in which we may ever rejoice that we "are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6: 14). Yet that fact does not absolve us from a life of obedience, as, the succeeding verses, in Romans 6, plainly show. Our unconverted lives were marked by the yielding of our members as servants, that in their varied lusts we might obey sin. Now, as converted, we yield our members as servants of righteousness, that so we may obey God.

Moreover, the whole character of the service that we may render under grace is transformed. Were we under the law, such obedience as we managed to offer, would be rendered under compulsion, in order, if possible, to live and establish our position. But now, being delivered from the law and brought under the loving authority of Christ, we serve and obey "in newness of spirit" (Rom. 7: 6). The Gospel has brought us under the mighty influence of the love of Christ, and this produces a glad and spontaneous obedience, not to secure something for ourselves, but rather to please our Saviour.

Of this obedience we read when we open Peter's first epistle. We are "elect," for God has chosen us in His foreknowledge, and we have been reached "through sanctification of the Spirit," and that has committed us to "obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." In this sentence the words, "of Jesus Christ," evidently apply to the obedience as well as to the blood. The sprinkling of His blood was needed to clear us from all the sins that accumulated in our former life of disobedience; and now we are committed to a life of obedience, the pattern of which is the perfect obedience that He rendered in His pathway here. We are to obey as He obeyed.

This imparts a very high and holy character to the life of a Christian, and our first impression may be to regard it as an impracticable ideal. But it is not so, as we may see if we carefully read the first epistle of John. We are there regarded as "born of God," and therefore we have a nature which, viewed abstractly, in its essential nature, "cannot sin," and "doeth righteousness," and therefore we have the capacity to walk as He walked, and do as He did. This will be seen, if in that epistle we read, 1 John 2: 5, 6, 29; 1 John 3: 6, 7, 10, 16; 1 John 4: 11-13; 1 John 5: 1-4, 18. We have the flesh still in us and all too often it displays its ugly features: but this is our essential character, as born of God; and so it is possible for us to obey even as Christ obeyed.

In the Scriptures there are ample warnings against disobedience. We will mention but three. A very instructive Old Testament one is found in 1 Samuel 15, when Saul was sent to destroy the Amalekites. He was told why this severe sentence was to be carried out, though why it was to extend even to their flocks and herds, is not mentioned: but so it was. Now the flocks and herds were desirable possessions, and so under cover of zeal for sacrifices in the service of the Lord, Saul did not do what he was told, but spared them. This brought forth the word of the Lord through Samuel, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (verse 22).

This incident unmasks for us a very subtle temptation to disobedience in the service of the Lord. Saul was now to accomplish what God has decreed, as we see if we read Deuteronomy 25: 17-19, and so serve the will of God. All true service for us is the carrying out of the will of God, but in grace, since grace characterizes the epoch in which we live. How easily, even in the service of grace, we may be tempted to spare what God has condemned, and do so under cover of honouring God. Our deviation from obedience may seem to us to be an advancement of the work of God, but thus it never is. We

cannot serve God and sacrifice to Him after our own thoughts. It is for us to **obey**.

Another temptation is to assume that the lapse of time induces some alteration in the divine instructions. There was evidently a tendency in this direction under the law of Moses, as century after century passed. In the days of Malachi over a thousand years had passed since the law was given, and hence that word in his fourth chapter, "Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." This is the closing injunction of the Old Testament.

Two sad things had happened when Malachi prophesied. First, the majority of the people had been for several centuries scattered among the nations. Second, among the minority, gathered back into the land, grave defection and disobedience had supervened. There must have been strong temptation, specially among the scattered ones, to think — I am indeed a child of Israel, but in my present **abnormal** conditions I need hardly concern myself with the law, given to my nation in their **normal** state. The word through Malachi was — The law was given for "**all Israel**," and therefore, if of Israel, it applies to you, whatever your state may be.

Again, the temptation may have been even stronger for them to say, — But surely, if we try to remember the main demands of the law, we need not concern ourselves with all those minor details, that come under "the statutes and judgments." But this subtle error is met with equal directness. The law, the whole law in all its details, was as binding on the children of Israel as their dispensation drew on to its close, as it was at the outset. To obey it was the responsibility set before them by the prophet.

A third temptation for us is to assume that small details of our behaviour, or of church order and procedure, as laid down in New Testament writings, may lapse, or possibly need alteration, as the days in which we live are marked by such extraordinary progress in human affairs. In this connection let us read 1 Corinthians 14: 36, 37. Many disorders, some of them of a very grave kind, had crept into the large Christian assembly at Corinth. The word of God did not come out from them. It came unto them only, and in a very special way by this epistle, which the Apostle wrote to them.

Now, in this chapter 14, quite definite instructions are given as to how things should be ordered when they came together in assembly, whether concerning giving thanks, or singing, or prayer, or even ministry of a prophetic character. Having given these instructions, Paul called upon the saints at Corinth to recognize that these, together with all the earlier instructions he gave, were not just his own ideas of what would be seemly, but were, "the commandments of the Lord." That being so, our duty is perfectly plain. It is not for us to attempt to explain them away, or to treat them as merely Paul's view of things, or as instructions quite appropriate in the first century, but really outdated in this twentieth century of the Christian era; but rather, as far as we may understand them, to **obey** them.

In a time of dispensational change we may find instructions given, which later are countermanded: Matthew 28: 19, for instance, alters what Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew 10: 5. Again, Luke 22: 36, countermands earlier instructions. But when a dispensation is established, the instructions given at the outset abide until the dispensation's end. Romans 1: 5, states that the Gospel comes to all nations that it may be **obeyed**. The same epistle ends with the fact that the mystery, that springs out of the Gospel, is made known among all nations "**for the obedience of faith.**"

May all of us, who confess Jesus as our Lord, be more concerned as to walking in obedience — **that character of glad and devoted obedience that characterized Him.**