

## "The obedience of faith"

Romans 1: 5

F. B. Hole.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 40, 1959-61, page 264.)

It is worthy of note that this expression, which we have taken as our title, occurs twice in the Epistle to the Romans; first in the opening verses, in connection with the Gospel, that Paul was commissioned to preach, and then again in the closing verses of the epistle, in connection with the Mystery, that he also had to make known, among all the nations.

Now the Roman saints were dwelling in the city which at that time dominated the civilised world, and imposed obedience upon the many and various peoples it had subjugated. Very easily therefore they might have been somewhat infected by the masterful spirit that surrounded them, and so have not sufficiently realized that genuine faith commits the one who possesses it to a life of obedience. The spirit of disobedience is rampant in the world of today, so we modern Christians very much need to come face to face with the importance of obedience in the things of God.

Most of us, we venture to think would hardly begin by linking together in our minds faith and obedience: We would more probably think of faith as producing blessing -whether salvation, or intelligence, or consolation. It may be healthful for us therefore to consider for a moment how obedience does spring out of faith, whether in connection with the Gospel or the Mystery.

The epistle to the Romans is, as doubtless we know, the orderly unfolding of the Gospel for the instruction of believers. In it we discover first of all how a just God can yet justify ungodly sinners, clearing them from all their offences and reconciling them to Himself. We read on to the latter part of Romans 5, and another matter confronts us, equally serious, if not more so. We possess fallen natures, from which all our sins have sprung. We learn that God has introduced Another — spoken of in 1 Corinthians 15 as "the Last Adam" — and we believers are identified with Him in His death and resurrection. Our "old man" — all that we were as fallen children of Adam — has been "crucified with Him" and we are now brought into His risen life. Does this impose any obligation upon us?

It clearly does. Though believers, the old Adamic nature has not been eradicated from us, and therefore we may all too easily be governed practically by it, obeying its lusts which are simply sin. And all the time we have been brought into this new risen life in Christ, and indwelt by His Spirit. Hence this definite instruction now reaches us, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord;" or, more correctly, "in Christ Jesus."

Now this demands obedience on our part, and it must be the obedience of faith. Faith apprehends that of which the previous verse speaks; namely, that Christ "died unto sin once: but in that He liveth He liveth unto God." He had no sin in Him, but it was on Him, in its bitter judgment when He died on the cross; but having exhausted its judgment, in His risen life He lives to God. Now in all this we have been identified with Him through grace. Have we in faith laid hold of this? Then how shall we in faith obey it?

Obviously, by the complete reversal of our former mode of life. In our unconverted days we shared the life of the men and women of the world. We were very much alive to sin in its multifarious forms and wholly dead to God. The **reckoning** of faith sets before us the exact opposite of this: and the **obedience** of faith makes the reckoning of faith a practical reality in our lives. Were this so with all of

us, and all the time, what a tremendous contrast there would be visible between the lives lived by Christians and those lived by the world that surrounds them. The practical effects of the Gospel would be very clear to all. And this is as God intends it to be.

The Mystery, which is alluded to at the end of Romans, is not expounded there, but rather in the Epistle to the Ephesians, so there we may find how the obedience of faith may be rendered in connection with it. If the opening verses of Ephesians 2 be carefully read, we notice that in verses 1 and 2, it is "you," — Gentiles — who are considered, whereas in verse 3, it is "we," — Jews — that are scrutinized. The verdict on both comes to the same thing, "dead in trespasses and sins." Out of both these classes some are being reached, and are "quicken . . . together with Christ," by the rich mercy of God. Now to quicken is to bestow life, and this life which is ours together with Christ is a work of new creation, as we see when we reach Ephesians 2: 10 — "For we are His workmanship **created** in Christ Jesus unto good works." The word for "create" occurs again in verse 15, though there translated, "make." The enmity between Jew and Gentile is for the saints today abolished since God's present work is "to **create** in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

In Old Testament days the law demanded a rigid separation between Jew and Gentile, that the Jew might not be infected by Gentile idolatries. That a day would come when God would introduce a new creation order of things, in which this separation would be completely abolished, could not then be made known, but had to remain a "mystery," or "secret." Now however among all nations, where the Gospel penetrates, this mystery is revealed, and the faith that receives it leads to obedience, for it imposes a responsibility upon all those brought into it by the mercy of God. Obedience is therefore required.

Take, for instance, Ephesians 4: 3. The clashes that damaged the early Christian assemblies sprang largely from the introduction of Jewish rigidity and ceremonialism on the one hand, or Gentile laxity and intellectualism on the other: Romans 14 is a chapter that emphasizes this, as also do verses 3 and 16 of Colossians 2. In our day, nineteen centuries later, the Jewish-Gentile clash may not be so evident; but if we found ourselves in an assembly, wherein were converts from Asia and Africa, as well as from America and Britain, we should soon discover how needed is the injunction to keep "the unity of the Spirit."

This unity being the creation of the Spirit of God, we could never have made it, nor can we break it; though as a matter of practical life we may "keep" it, or we may ignore it. In the measure in which we yield the obedience of faith to that which the mystery has established and revealed, we shall be keeping it.

How we need then to stir one another up to the yielding of the obedience of faith, both to the Gospel that we have received, and the Mystery, that has been revealed to us.