

## Christian Obedience the Obedience of Christ

1 Peter 1: 2.

J. A. Trench.

It is my desire, with the Lord's help, to look a little into the place and character of the obedience which this passage shows to have been in the thoughts of God for us from eternity. There is nothing I fear, if one may speak for others, that we enter so little into. Yet it involves the whole principle and blessedness of the christian position, and the life which belongs to it.

In the passage the words "obedience" and "sprinkling of the blood" equally depend on "of Jesus Christ." This at once brings out the distinct character of the obedience. Peter, writing to the believing "strangers [or "sojourners"] of the dispersion," connects their position with the counsels and foreknowledge of God the Father; and in terms that while, I doubt not, conveying an analogy, are intended to suggest the great contrast between this position and that of the Jew nationally. If Jehovah had chosen Israel as a nation, to be a special people unto Himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth (Deut. 7: 6), these Christians from among them were chosen individually of God the Father, which at once gives a far more intimate relationship. If for the nation there had been an outward sanctification by ordinances (Lev. 18 - 20 see especially Lev. 20: 24-26), theirs was the "sanctification of the Spirit" — an effectual work of God that, applying the truth in power to their souls, had separated them to Him, thus carrying into effect His counsels. (Compare 2 Thess. 2: 13.) Then as to the object of these counsels and work — "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." For the nation, from Sinai, the condition of entrance into blessing was obedience to the law, to which they were bound by the blood — the penal sanction of death — which Moses sprinkled upon the people. (Ex. 24: 6-8.) For the Christian it is a wholly contrasted character of obedience — "of Jesus Christ"; that is, in other words, to obey as He obeyed. For this the heart is set free, by His blood-shedding having met every question of sin for the glory of God, and purged our consciences. The blood of Jesus Christ, instead of establishing the authority of the law by a death penalty on disobedience, becomes by His meeting it in infinite grace the delivering power for an obedience after the only pattern of His own. The verse presents the beautiful contrast of the christian position in every particular. And the place it gives obedience, and that so totally new in character, as the end and object of God in the blessing we have been brought into, commands the deepest interest and the subjection of our souls.

The first great thing to apprehend clearly is, the difference in the whole principle of it between the obedience of Jesus Christ and that which the law claimed. The law was addressed to man in the flesh, giving the perfect rule of what he ought to be for God. But now that the full character of the flesh has come out, we know that it is "enmity against God," "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." So that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Thus the flesh is in its nature opposed to the rule imposed upon it; and a law given to it must mainly consist, as in fact it did, of prohibitions — "thou shalt not" — "thou shalt not"; or if it be considered in its most positive requirements, what a state of things is revealed that necessitated God's demanding His creature's love! Yet how inoperative, save to condemn: God unrevealed to be loved ["Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was" (Ex. 20: 21)]; no giving of a nature capable of loving Him. Nor was love ever produced by commanding it; or, if thus produced, of what value would it be? Yet it will be found in dealing with souls, that the ordinary idea of obedience does not go beyond what the law claimed, but was ineffectual, flesh being what it is in fallen man, to produce; and the serious thing is, that wherever the idea obtains it shuts out any true conception of what the obedience of the Christian is.

Nor is it only the law that accustoms us to the thought of an obedience wholly different in principle to that of Christ's, but even that which we constantly, and rightly, look for from our children. I say to my child at its play. "Go and do your lessons and the child gives up its play and sets to work, and we say that is an obedient child. But that is, that the child having a will to do what was pleasant to it, has given up its will to do mine, however distasteful; and the more the thing was distasteful in itself, the more the child's obedience would be shown. It is in principle that of the law's claim; only that the child's known relationship, and the affections flowing from it, furnish a motive to lead to obedience that the law could not give.

Now in what total contrast to all this is the obedience of Christ, as the word presents it? Come (*genomenos*) of woman, *come* under the law, He obeyed it perfectly; He magnified and made it honourable in submitting to its obedience, but not as having to be forbidden what *He* desired. "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I *delight* to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is *within my heart*." Neither was it any way the character of His obedience that He gave up His own will before the authority of the Father's will: for, He says, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." As thus come, we see One whose only will was to do God's will.

It is of such a character of obedience that the epistle of James speaks (James 1: 25), "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein." The revealed mind of God is what is referred to; but first (ver. 18) it is "the word of truth" by which we have been *begotten* of God, so that we have received the nature of Him whose word it is. To the child of God then the word only comes to direct a nature he possesses in that in which it already delights. It is thus "a perfect law" — a law of liberty upon which the mind becomes fixed objectively — the law and the nature going together; or, as if I said to my child, "Go and play" — bidding just what pleases it.

But that the word should be this to us, far deeper principles are involved, connected with a state subjectively suited to the revelation found in the word. And first there must be *deliverance* out of a state wholly contrary to it. For if the nature we have received, in being born of the incorruptible seed by the living and abiding word of God, delights in what is revealed therein as His will, there is the flesh within that is, as we have seen, diametrically opposed. But when the condition of the flesh has been learned *experimentally*, as it must be learned, and we know by fruitless efforts under law, after good in it, that it is nothing but evil — if it is not I, but that is too strong for me — and the point of "O, wretched man that I am" has been reached; the neck of the flesh's will has been broken, and the soul thankfully bows to the absolute necessity of God's way of dealing with it, so long before intimated; "The end of all flesh is come before me." (Gen. 6: 13.) Then I learn that "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin [*i.e.* "as a sacrifice for sin"] condemned sin in the flesh." But this condemnation having taken place in the death of Him who gave Himself for me that He might be my life, I see that I am entitled to count all that took place in His death as having happened to me. Thus we *know* that "our old man," that is, all we were as characterised by sin and the flesh, "has been crucified with Him that the body of sin" — its whole system and power — "might be annulled, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." (Rom. 6: 6.) Then in the diligence of faith, reckoning ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God, of which position in both its parts Christ is the wonderful pattern (ver. 10), we tolerate the will of the flesh no longer. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions thereof." We have died to the law too — which was the "strength of sin" (1 Cor. 15: 56), instead of being any strength against it — "by the body of Christ, that we should be to another, to Him that is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Rom. 7: 4, 5.) And not being under the law we are led of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 18), and the righteousness [*dikaïoma*, full sum of what it

required] of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh under law, but after the Spirit as the power of the life have in Christ. (Rom. 8: 4.)

But the truth goes farther still. It is not merely that, by death to sin and the power of the Spirit there has been a positive deliverance from the dominion of sin, the flesh in the man condemned; but the *man himself must go*. The Epistle to the Colossians leads us into this deeper aspect of the death of Christ (Col. 2: 11, 12); "ye have died" (Col. 3: 3); and this become so real, as God presents it to faith, that the practical consequence can be pressed (Col. 2: 20), "Wherefore if ye have *died with Christ* from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" Why go and falsify your whole place as a Christian by subjecting yourself to ordinances that suppose the *man* to be alive; whereas the truth is that we have died with Christ out of our whole place and living status as such, to have it in a totally new sphere, risen with Him — now to know Christ as our life, and to be directed to objects where He is, to form the life practically by Him here, where we have been left to represent Him.

Yet there is another point, touched on indeed in this epistle (Col. 2: 13), but not further developed there, that has to be reached in the faith of our souls, in order that we may apprehend our full place in Christ, from which it flows that His path is ours; not now death and resurrection with Christ to clear us out from all that was connected with man in responsibility here, his guilt and state closed, but what has resulted from the full disclosure of that *state* in the long, patient trial of the ages, ending in the rejection of Christ; namely, that he is *dead in sins*. The Epistle to the Ephesians brings us to this proved universal condition of the first man. (Eph. 2: 1-10.) In 2 Corinthians 5, the added light of the cross is thrown upon it; for if God had to give up His Son to death that any might live, it was the plain proof that man was given up of God as dead; and this in contrast to dealings with him *up to the cross* that supposed him to be alive. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." Now into this scene of universal death of man by and in sin, and where Christ was dead in grace for sin, God came in power to form a new creation, "If any man be in Christ there is a new creation"; raising up Christ as the first act of His power to be the beginning and head of it, and then quickening us together with Him. This involves His whole position as seated in the heavenlies, a position revealed to faith that we might know and realize it as a present thing in the power of the Spirit.

To Paul it is given to develop this new creation on the side of our place in Christ according to the eternal counsels of God; while in John's epistle (all we have learned through Paul as to the divine clearance made of the first man in judgment being assumed) it is brought out on the side of Christ as our life, involving participation in the divine nature, John being thus in teaching the complement of Paul. If in Paul the full christian position has been seen to be of a new creation of God, in John our condition is viewed as wholly of the same; and by the teaching of the Spirit through both apostles, He also being given to dwell in us as the power of our realization of it, we know that the Son is in the Father, and, in marvellous association of thought, that we are in Him and He in us. (John 14: 20.)

In 1 John then it is not the believer now looked at as with a war of two opposed principles within him — the flesh of which he has been born into this world, and the divine nature as born of God (though "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"); but now, all that is of the first man gone in the death of Christ, God sets before us the characteristic privileges and nature of the life we have been brought into in the second Man, as if we never had another — a life which, according to the threefold testimony (1 John 5: 6-12) of the *Spirit* come from the glory of Christ, of the *water* for purification, and of the *blood* for propitiation (water and blood alike flowing from His side in death — the end of man in judgment), is absolutely God's gift to us in His Son.

It may seem to have been a long digression, but the truths that have been before us are necessary in order that we should enter into our having been set apart for the obedience of Christ; so that no lower character of obedience may be seen to belong to the Christian. The Epistle of John puts it into its full place for us, the introductory part (1 John 1 - 2: 11) bringing out the great principles of the epistle. 1 John 1: 1-4 teaches us the wonderful privilege of the life we have been brought into in "fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" that our joy may be full; verse 5 to the end characterises this fellowship by the principles of God's own nature as light, going on in grace (1 John 2: 1, 2) even to divine resources for its practical restoration if absolutely interrupted by sin; verses 3-11 adding the test of the two great principles of the divine nature in man, as manifested in Christ — obedience and love, by which false pretension to the possession of the privilege is judged.

Thus the essential principle of the christian position in its deepest privilege is disclosed. The life that was true in Him alone when He was here, shining as the light of men, but in darkness that apprehended it not, is — now that He has closed that state of man for God and for faith in the judgment of the cross, and taken His new place as man in the glory of God — "*true in him and in you*, because the darkness is passing and the true light now shineth." The commandments and word, that were the full expression of the life in Him — as He says, in answer to the question, "Who art thou?" (John 8: 25.) "Altogether (or "essentially" *ten archen*) that which I also say to you" — I am in nature what I speak — are now given to form and direct that life in us, wonderfully "new" in such application to us, but really the "old commandment which ye had from the beginning." Thus whatever blessed traits of that life are seen as expressed in Christ's path here, become His word, with divine authority over me as His commandments too, to indicate what alone is true as the expression of the same life in me. Hence the intimate links that constantly connect the gospel and epistles of John.

Thus wholly contrasted in principle is the obedience of Christ to anything known or presented to man before. Instead of a law acting from outside upon a nature wholly foreign and opposed to it, it is the revealed will of God, livingly expressed in the commandments and word of Christ, coming home with authority by these to a nature which, as His own in us, responds to and delights in that will, and knows no liberty but in obedience.

Sweet it is then to turn to the lowly life of Jesus, where that obedience is seen in all its perfection; even though the incomparable glory of it humbles us, and we feel more and more the utter poverty of all our thoughts of Him. The Psalm (Ps. 40) from which I have already quoted, brings us to His entrance into the place of it, where for the first time it was possible for Him to obey. All the Jewishly-ordained sacrifices are set aside as having nothing in them for the heart of God, now to find its entire satisfaction in Him who says, "Mine ears hast thou opened," or, more literally, "Ears hast thou digged for me." But as this necessitated His becoming man, the Spirit accepts the paraphrase of the LXX translators, in quoting it in Hebrews 10, "A body hast thou prepared me."<sup>1</sup>

In Isaiah 50 we find Him come, and in the path — "When I came was there no man? When I called was there none to answer?" But who was it that came? He who had power to redeem and to deliver, who had all nature at His command as its Creator and Lord. In what character then did He come? "The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to succour by a word him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed. The Lord Jehovah hath opened mine ear." He who was Jehovah came, a man to be

---

1 Note that in Hebrews the delight of the Lord Jesus is omitted as not so much the point of the Spirit's testimony, but the perfection of the work for God, the contrast of what gave Him *no pleasure* being strongly brought out. (Heb. 10: 5, 6, 8.)

dependent and obedient; for this was man's perfection suited to the place He had taken: instructed out of His own deep experience of human sorrow in that place, how to succour the weary by a word, but as Himself looking for direction to God, with His ear wakened morning by morning to receive it. What a study for our hearts! What an obedience is thus foreshadowed — of One to whom alone as man will of right belonged, but become man only to carry out the Father's will, and so waiting upon Him in that blessed communion in which He ever walked for the instruction of it. In the gospels we trace the actual footsteps of the path of the Lord Jesus.

But before we turn to them, the doctrine of the epistles comes in largely to increase our apprehension of it — I refer especially to Philippians and Hebrews. In both we find the same wonderful truths of who He was and of the place that He had taken, which are indeed inseparable. In Philippians 2 the mind that was in Christ Jesus is to be now in us — a mind that, instead of reaching up as the first Adam to be as God, reached down until He could go down no lower. And there were two great steps in this stupendous stoop; for "subsisting in the form of God" it was no question of usurpation of what did not belong to Him "to be equal with God;" but He "emptied<sup>2</sup> Himself, taking a bondsman's form, becoming in the likeness of men; and, having been found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." As God He emptied Himself, as man He humbled Him. self; and His obedience in that place went on up to death, even that of the cross, in which it was put to the last possible test, and proved perfect — all He was thus entering into and giving its character to every step of His path. For it was nothing that man as such should be dependent and obedient; it was his apostasy that he departed from it. But that He, in whom "all the fulness was pleased to dwell," should take man's subject place, to glorify God by answering to it perfectly and never leaving it, gives the humiliation, and dependence, and obedience displayed in it their only measure and infinite glory.

The same great elements of the truth come out, only if possible, with greater fulness in the Epistle to the Hebrews. For if Hebrews 1, while fixing the eye of faith on Him who as man, having by Himself made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, leads us by ever-ascending steps to the full, divine glory of His person — *from* being born Son of God into this world (ver. 5), object of angels' worship (ver. 6), addressed as God by God according to Psalm 45 (vers. 8, 9), to being owned as Jehovah by Jehovah, and this when in the lowest depths of His humiliation according to Psalm 102 (vers. 10-12; Hebrews 2 brings out the reality of His manhood, and the purposes of God accomplished in it, not merely as necessary to His having the place of universal supremacy marked out for man by Psalm 8: 5-8, but for far deeper reasons connected with God's glory, and the state of those with whom He became man to identify Himself, and conduct them as the sons of God to glory. (See for four such reasons vers. 10, 14, 17, 18.)

All in *this* chapter then depends upon, and is brought out to be the proof of, His true humanity. Only as man could the Sanctifier and the sanctified be "of one," and He "not ashamed to call them brethren." Yet the corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, else He must have abode alone in His humanity; It is then as the *risen* Christ that He is able to associate us with Him, as we hear Him

---

<sup>2</sup> We can appreciate the hesitation that our English translators may have felt in rendering literally, in such a connection, the most wonderful word they had before them, *ekenose* (Ver. 7.) From Tyndale down (Wycliffe had "lowered himself") they adopted the paraphrase "made himself of no reputation;" and there is this to be said for it, that if "emptied" necessarily involved the thought of something *of which* He emptied Himself, the paraphrase would be truer to the sense: for the word refers, as the participial clauses following show, to the place He assumed rather than to that from which He came.

say, according to the words of Psalm 22, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren," and "in the midst of the assembly will I sing praise unto thee" - *opening* the wilderness for us with a song of redemption more wonderful by far, through such association, than that of Moses and Israel. (Ex. 15)

"It is finished! It is finished!

Who can tell redemption's worth?

He who knows it leads the singing.

Full the joy, is fierce the wrath."

Then He has set us the example of dependence for *all the way*, "I will put my trust in him (from the LXX of Isaiah 8: 17) until the last quotation, in the same connection in the prophet, brings us to the *end* of the path — the remnant of the house of Jacob displayed with Him as His children in glory. Thus the mystery of His humbled place as man, the stumbling-block of Israel's pride, is solved; and we have Him fully in the path of man: suffering being tempted, but thus able to succour the tempted ones: learning obedience by the things that He suffered, thus able to sympathise; and the epistle does not close without bringing Him in as the last of the long line of witnesses to the principle of faith as the power of the just man's life, if in this as in all things He must have the pre-eminence — "the beginner and completer of faith." (Heb. 12: 2.)

But obedience is the special point before us in the blessed unfolding of the Lord's place as man, that the epistle gives us. See then how, if in contrast to Israel's priests, who being taken from among themselves could exercise forbearance towards the ignorant and the wanderers, we have a great High Priest that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God; and if His very exaltation and glory as such seems to take Him out of the range and reach of human need to be able to sympathise, the Spirit of God can recall to us (ver. 7) "the days of his flesh," in which "when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him out of death," He was "heard for his godly fear." (*eulabeia*; compare Heb. 12: 28, where the same word occurs, His reverent submission to the will of God.)

Thus what full capacity, albeit that He is the Son of God in glory, to enter into all that connects itself with human weakness! What are our deepest distresses as compared with His, who "though He were a Son, *learned obedience* by the things which He suffered"? But what could surpass the grace that presents Him to our hearts as having passed through our school? He entered it indeed in a very different way, and for wholly different reasons than we, who have to learn obedience (it is the great lesson God is teaching us in all His ways with us) because, alas! too long accustomed to disobey — He, because ever accustomed to command. He had never before been in circumstances in which obedience could be rendered. Not that there was anything in that holy nature contrary to obedience; as we have seen, He became man only to obey, and found His sole motive for everything in obedience. But thus He learned it. Only that the Spirit mould now lead on the Hebrews addressed, from a side of things, unspeakably precious in itself but connected with what He was down here, "unto perfection," connected as this always is with His place as man in glory according to the counsels of God (Heb. 5: 9-14; Heb. 6: 1) There only all His precious sympathy and succour is now to be found; thither He would lead up our hearts: and thus the great object of the epistle is carried on, that those whose religious relationships with God had been earthly in Judaism, should be weaned from them to new relationships that now were wholly heavenly.

We have seen then, in the doctrine of the Old Testament and of the New, what gives its character to the obedience to which we are sanctified. That It was that of the Son of God become man, to render

it in a perfection beyond all that could have been otherwise conceived, so contrary in its nature to all that man is naturally. But we must turn to the gospels to seek in the power of the Spirit to trace a little the detail of that perfection in His walk: no more wonderful study could be presented to our poor hearts, so slow to enter into it. The test came early. For when — in fulfilling righteousness (Matt. 3: 15), that is, carrying out God's will, His first public act was to identify Himself in John's baptism with those who, in submitting to it, took their true place before God, confessing their sins, and were thereby proved to be "the saints, the excellent of the earth" in whom was all His delight — with the opened heavens, and the descent upon Him of the Holy Spirit, the Father's voice declared Him to be, *in the humble place He had thus taken*, the object of the Father's delight, the very next thing is that He is led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

But what circumstances for the Son of God to be found in in this world! "Having fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He hungered. And the tempter coming up to him said, If thou art Son of God, speak, that these stones may become loaves of bread." But simple as it would have been for Him, with all divine resources ever at command to help Himself to bread, He would not put forth power to take Himself out of any consequence of the place He had come into as man. He had not become man to command; man's place was to obey, and the enemy is foiled by His keeping that place perfectly. "It is written, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" He waits therefore — will only act, if it be but in the matter of taking necessary food, when there is a word from God for it. But more than that, He *lived* by it, for this was God's will for man according to the passage that He quotes, if now for the first time it was realized in man — not merely a *path* outwardly directed by the word, but an inward *life* formed by it, of every movement of which the word was the motive and source.

Well may we pause at the outset of such a study, beloved brethren, and put it to ourselves honestly before God, Do we know indeed that this is the obedience to which we have been sanctified? I am not speaking of failure in walking according to it; but have we bowed without reserve to the principle of it as thus brought to the test by Satan, and proved in its absolute perfection in the blessed Lord. Then we shall know how to judge in the secret of our hearts any spring of thought or action that has not its source in God's known will. I say known, because there is no more subtle form of temptation than when it is pressed upon us that circumstances call for action, when there is no word from God, no intimation of His will. Yet if we act without knowing God's will nothing can be more certain than that we are doing our own; and this is the essence of sin. "Behold obedience is better than sacrifice, attention than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination and self-will is as iniquity and idolatry." (1 Sam. 15: 22, 23, New Trans.) Nothing in man is right except obedience. Confidence in God will be surely needed for waiting, as with the Lord, left for forty days without food; and this was the principle brought out in the next temptation: but is it a strange thing, to those who know His heart as perfectly revealed in the Son, that we should trust Him?

This testing took place then alone with Satan, but under the eye of One who appraises it as none else could, and reveals it in grace to us, that delighting in it with Him we may learn man's true place of obedience and be formed by it.

A very different form of testing arose with the *circumstances of His rejection*, as it began to come out more and more plainly. We see the effect of it on His spirit in Matthew 11. His testimony, as that of His forerunner, was as rejected by that generation; He felt it. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not," more hard of heart than Tyre or Sodom. But (ver. 25) He bows in the deep trial to His Father, answering the rejection of the cities by, "I thank thee . . . even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." What rest in the known wisdom

and love of the Father, and what perfect submission also, as He traces all that pressed upon Him to its source there! Then if He exercises divine will, it is not for Himself, but only, as always (Matt. 8: 3; John 5: 21), to meet need in man, in carrying out the testimony of grace committed to Him. Here it is to reveal the Father; so as to give us the same resource and resting-place He had in the knowledge of the Father, and then to call us to take His yoke upon us, learning from Him ("meek and lowly in heart" 1) that submission in which rest is, practically *found* for the soul, whatever the circumstances. Testing then, in whatever form — whether from Satan or from men — only drew out before God and His Father the sweet savour of a divinely perfect obedience now found for the first time in man upon earth.

But for the full positive development of it we must go to the Gospel of John, where, above all, the divine glory of His Person shines forth; than which nothing can be more remarkable in the connection of the truth. Here He is the Word that was with God, and was God — for none other could express God — the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, come to make Him known according to that relationship, even as One *in it* only could. He can say, "Before Abraham was, I am;" "I and my Father are one:" yet it is ever the Son become flesh, whom we see, and who, true to the place of man, never assumes anything to Himself, but delights to receive all — even when it belongs to the rights of His Person — from the Father. He may speak and act as none but a divine Person could; yet He never leaves the place of a servant, subject to the Father, carrying out that for which He was sent. Surely the mystery of His Person meets us everywhere: nowhere else is there such an unfolding of obedience as in this gospel.

His ministry opens in John 4. He had found a poor sinner to whom He could reveal Himself in an activity of grace that formed, as to His life in connection with men, His only joy here. There was manifest refreshment for His spirit in it. He sees the fields already white for harvest in the light of that one soul brought to know herself and Him. But the sources of it lay deeper than the disciples could enter into: "I have meat [or "food"] to eat that ye know not." Wherein did it consist? Not merely in outward acts of service. "My food is that I should *do the will of Him* that has sent me, and that I *should finish his work.*" What a character this gives His whole path! His food, the very sustenance of His life, was in carrying out the Father's will.

John 5 becomes a complete revelation of the place He has taken, as of Him who takes it. Divine grace, active in power to bless even on the Sabbath day, had clashed with Jewish stickling for forms. How little they knew the heart of God, who thought that He could *rest* in a world where there was the cry of human misery on every hand. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," revealed that heart, but in terms that they knew well involved the perfect community of nature between the Son who spoke and the Father; and they charge Him with *making Himself* equal with God. Nothing could be further from the truth, as to One who never sought His own glory, but only the glory of Him that sent Him (John 7: 18; John 8: 50); yet to be on such an equality was no usurping of what did not belong to Him, as we have seen. But He had emptied Himself, becoming in the likeness of man; and so He answered them, "The Son can do, nothing from [*apo*] himself, but whatever He sees the Father do." He had not come down to act as an independent divine Person on earth in the exercise of His own will and power, but in perfect dependence; and in the communion in which He ever walked with His Father, we learn further that "whatever things *he* doeth, these also doeth the Son in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that he himself doeth;" and this carried out even in quickening whom He will (ver. 21); while verses 27-30 show that not otherwise will it be in the exercise of the *judgment* committed to Him. "I cannot do anything from myself: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is righteous; because I do not *seek* my will, but the will of him that sent me." Oh, how it searches and humbles us to hear Him speak of not even *seeking will* of His, but only that the Father's might be

accomplished!

In John 6: 38 *et seq.* it is the same thing that characterises Him as the bread of God; He came down from heaven to do the will of Him that sent Him. For if He found the food of His life here in doing that will, God found His bread,<sup>3</sup> the food of His own joy as it were, in Him as come down to do it. In wonderful grace, when we have reached Him through His death — "have eaten the flesh and drank the blood of the Son of man " (ver. 53), identifying ourselves thus by faith with His death, without which "there is no life to taste and to enjoy the bread," as another has truly said — verse 57 brings us into participation in what He was to God; "as the living Father has sent me, and I live by [or "on account of"] the Father; so he that eateth ME even he shall live on account of Me."

We have seen this principle of dependent obedience as to the *works* of the blessed Lord; but nothing gives a greater idea of its absoluteness than to find it also true of His *words*, "I speak to the world those things which I have heard from [*para*, "from with"] him;" though men would only recognise, when they had lifted up the Son of man, who He was, and how as to the place He had taken He neither acted from Himself, or spoke save "as my Father hath taught me." (John 8: 28.) How wonderfully the opened ear of Isaiah I., as of one that is instructed, has been verified in His path. For, as He says again (John 12: 49), I have not *spoken* of (*ek*) myself, but the Father which sent me He gave me a commandment what I should *say* and what I should *speak*. . . . Whatsoever I speak therefore even as the Father said unto me so I speak " — in words and works thus alike, the revealer of the Father; and so, as the verse tells us, "His commandment is life eternal": for it is eternal life to know the Father as thus revealed.

But we are nearing the end, for the enmity of man's heart was surging round that only path of perfect light ever seen in this world, where, in the Son become man, and keeping man's place in the simple perfection of dependent and delighting obedience, God found His delight and was glorified. The state of all men being thus fully revealed, it was necessary, because of that state as well as for the glory of God, that such a path should close here; but only in taking up that state to identify Himself with it in grace — and endure the judgment of God in which it is ended for ever for faith, as for God. Precious it is to know that meeting the judgment due to sin became only the occasion for manifesting the depth of the perfection of His obedience, laying therein a fresh ground for the Father's delight in Him: "Therefore doth my Father love me because I lay down my life that I might take it again." Divine power was needed, for "No one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down and power to take it again." But He will only exercise that power as ever in obedience — "This commandment have I received from my Father." (John 10: 17, 18.)

One more passage connects obedience with the spring of it, that whether in Him or in us, gives it all its blessed character and acceptance — LOVE. I refer to John 14: 30, 31: "Henceforth I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I *love the Father*, and as the *Father gave me commandment* so I do." What foothold could the enemy find in a life made up of nothing but love and obedience? Luke brings us to this final assault

---

3 Compare for the force of the expression Lev. 3: 11, 16; Lev. 21: 6, etc.; Num. 28: 2, 24; Ezek. 16: 19; Ezek. 44: 7, where "food," "bread," and "meat" are the same in Hebrew (the point being missed by the LXX., save in the last two quotations). Nor can I doubt that the "bread of God" here gets its character from this use; namely, that it is not merely the bread which He gives, but upon which He feeds first of all, as the infinite excellency and perfection of Christ, proved under all testing, in the lowly stoop and place He had taken to carry out the Father's will, yielding Him divine satisfaction and joy.

of Satan; he, who notes that after the temptation in the wilderness the devil departed from Christ for a *season*, and at the close that, if it was "man's hour," the "power of darkness" was awfully associated with it. (John 4: 13; John 22: 53.) In that Gospel too, in Gethsemane, the full force of the temptation comes before us, as that of Satan who, having by man's sin and the judgment of God, the power of death over man, sought to press it in that character upon Him, to deter Him from going the whole way in obedience. We are permitted to draw near and know what very real conflict it was to the blessed Lord, though none can fathom His sorrow, in anticipating having to pass out of the experience of communion with the Father which had been all the light and joy of His path, into that of being wholly forsaken of God. Presenting it before the Father in the unclouded communion in which He yet was, did but add poignancy to the sorrow. In His very perfection He shrank from such a cup. "Nevertheless not my will but thine be done " records His giving Himself up to It, in the perfection of obedience here brought to its absolute and final test. And the fiery trial over, in peace we hear Him say in John, "The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it? " as He went to the cross to exhaust that cup, as He alone could, and finish the work given Him to do. Thus in infinite depths of suffering He endured the judgment of the will of the flesh that once characterised us; but that even now we may be so easily betrayed into if not abiding in Him. Oh, that in true dependence and nearness of heart to the Lord we may know how to be "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus," that nothing but His will-less life may be manifested in our body.

Lastly, I would look at what the word connects with obedience, as the abounding portion of our hearts to be enjoyed in the path of it, and not to be known out of it. We have seen it as the principle, simple but of such far-reaching effect in the soul's history, of rest practically realized, as shown us *first in the experience of the blessed Lord Himself*. (Matt. 11) And this is true in every part of the blessing. For all flows out of the fact, so immense in itself, that it is of His own life and nature we live, of which His path here was the perfect expression and revelation.

Thus if in Philippians 2: 12. "as ye have always obeyed" was the condition, whether under apostolic care, as when Paul was with them, or now much more in its absence, of their deliverance from all the present allowed power of the enemy, the *mind* of obedience (as well as of self-emptiness) was expressed in Him, who, being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, becoming *obedient* unto death, even the death of the cross. (Vers. 5-8.) Here was the wonderful pattern for the saints. In the path of obedience the apostle had helped them to work out their salvation; they had only to go on in it now, that he was gone, and work out their own<sup>4</sup> salvation "with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both the willing and the working according to His good pleasure." The Lord's path had been the complete illustration of the principle; and the verses following (14-16) are just the reproduction in the saints of the blessed traits of His own life. His name and testimony involve us in a conflict which is *His* with Satan: the issue is not uncertain; we are on the winning side; He will bruise him under our feet shortly. But the enemy works by wiles; it is well not to be ignorant of his devices; fear and trembling have their wholesome place if we have learned to distrust ourselves; but we have only to be occupied with carrying out God's will in obedience, and are carried safely through all to the heavenly glory of Christ, which is the salvation of the epistle.

Still it is in the Gospel of John, where the obedience of Christ has been brought out to the full, that we find the full consequences in blessing of its being wrought in us; and first, in John 14. This precious instruction of the Lord opens out to us the Father's house, as connected first with the full revelation there *had been* of the Father in the Son come down here — "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; when with the place He was *about to take* as going to the Father on the ground of

---

4 In contrast to Paul's, not to God's.

accomplished redemption, "I go to prepare a place for you;" and lastly, with His *coming again* to receive us to Himself there. But meanwhile, between His going away and coming again, the Holy Spirit is promised as the power of our enjoyment of the new place, that it may become the present home of hearts that miss the Lord out of *this* place. All that follows from verse 16 is the effect of the Holy Spirit having been given us; we should not be left orphans, for the Lord Himself would come *to us*, to be known in a way He could not have been to the disciples. When the world saw Him no more we should see Him, and this intimately connected with living of His life — "Ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also." And further, "At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in me and I in you." If the Son has His place in the Father by the glory of His person, we have ours in Him by redemption, not only in divine righteousness before God, but — inseparably connected with such a position — He in us, as participating in His life and nature, now to be expressed in this world.

Now from verse 20 we have the path, the only possible one, in which the Spirit dwelling in us, and ungrieved, can be the power of the enjoyment of all this wonderful blessing. Flowing from a dependent life in Him it is but the path of that life, the reproduction in us of what constituted the life in Him as verse 31 shows it — love to the Father and obedience. And so verse 21, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Thus the obedience of love in us, being of His own life, brings with it the manifestation of the Lord Himself. Then when the thought of such a private manifestation to one, and not to another, clashed with Jewish thoughts of an appearing in glory that would be public and before all, the Lord in reply to Jude only deepens the character of the obedience, "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." The word differs from the commandments of Christ only in that it is the full revelation of His mind, whereas these have to do with details; as, for instance, the oft-repeated one, that we love one another. There is not a *commandment* for everything, but His *word* covers the whole range of the life leaving no room for the subtle plea of *self-will*, that *His* will is not revealed. Love keeping His word then brings with it not only the manifestation of the Son, but the coming of the Father and the Son to make their abode with the obedient one. So that the two characteristic joys of what is *before* us, the Father's "abodes" (for it is the same word in verses 2 and 23) and the Son's presence, are brought down to our hearts, and made the present portion, in the power of the Spirit, of the obedience of love — this obedience being but the true expression and path of the life we now possess in the Son.

John 15 confirms the wonderful character of the path set before us. There (ver. 9) we learn the only measure of His love — it is the Father's love to Him. But His desire is that we should *abide* in it — be in the enjoyment of it continually; for though the love does not depend upon our walk, the whole realisation of it does: "If ye *keep my commandments*, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might be in you, and your joy full." It is but the same path of the same life, now true in Him and in us, leading into the same joy — the joy He had in the Father's love.

One thing more is connected with it in verse 14, "Ye are my friends, *if ye do whatsoever I command you*." Oh, how unspeakable the privilege! to be treated not as servants who receive their orders, and that is all, but as the trusted friends of Christ to whom He communicates His mind — all things that He has heard of the Father — so as to be the depositaries of it in a world that has seen and hated both Him and the Father, and be formed by it as witnesses for Him.

The epistle (1 John) adds its testimony to the full blessedness to be found in walking according to our wholly new order of being as of a new creation in Christ.

In 1 John 2 we have already seen this to be the principle upon which the walk of Christ is the pattern of the Christian's. Let us look at it again as to the wonderful consequences flowing out of it. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." This is not given us as a test by which we may know *whether* we know Him — as often falsely used to lead souls not in the liberty of grace into doubt and perplexity; for the fact that we are addressed as to the characteristics of the divine nature assumes that we are partakers of it; it is impossible to conceive anything of a nature we do not possess, as that of angels. But It enables us to judge (as do all the tests of the epistle) the pretensions of human wisdom, and the like, to have part in christian privilege when Christ is unknown. For how can we know Him save as having His life and living of it! Certain it is that man in the flesh does not know Him" the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God;" but as we have seen everywhere that life consisted of obedience. Hence "he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him;" while, on the other hand, every footstep in the path of obedience confirms and deepens in the soul the knowledge that we have of Him. The next verse shows the character of the knowledge contemplated; it is not that of ordinary acquaintance, but of communion with the One we know in partaking of His nature, and walking according to it: "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him." Keeping His word is not different from keeping His commandments — "The old commandment is the word which ye have heard" (John 2: 7) — but only carries the obedience further as in John 14. His word is that in which all that He is in His own nature of love was perfectly expressed. That love is now shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us — God, who is love, thus dwelling in us. In keeping the word then, which is the revelation of the *love*, there is nothing to hinder the full realisation of it; it is perfected in us, and we know that we are in Him. Again, it is but His own path, "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Oh for hearts in the power of the Spirit to enter into the character of that walk a little more! So walking — the normal life of the Christian — our heart condemns us not; we have confidence toward God; we are formed by His mind in the intimacy of the confidence in which we walk, and "whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we *keep his commandments*, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." (1 John 3: 16-22, Compare John 8: 29.) And this leads into the last blessed consequence of such a life and path of obedience, as brought out in the last verse — there is nothing beyond it for ever — "He that keepeth his commandments *dwelleth* in him." The heart, first drawn to Him by all the infinite grace revealed in Him, as its refuge from itself, and its hiding-place, now in the path of obedience — that is, of the divine nature — knows Him as its dwelling-place. and home; the richest fruit individually of all the ways of that grace with us. It is surely an inestimable joy that may thus be our portion now. But as essential to it, in the possession of the divine nature,. "He dwells in us," and we know it "by the Spirit which he hath given us," as the power of the manifestation of all that is true of that nature, and that nothing else may be tolerated in the life of the Christian.

And now, in closing, I would put. it to myself as to my beloved brethren: How are our hearts, affected by such a calling, that setting us *in* Christ by place, and *as* Christ by life, nature, and relationship before God and the Father, can give us no other path here than that in which He walked, doing always those things that please Him? It is profitable for our souls to pass and repass our life in review before God in the light of such an obedience, and consider how much of it would have been left out, how many things in word, action, or thought would never have occurred if Christ had been filling our hearts. Deeply humbling as such a review of the past must be to each of us it is well if it only shuts us up the more absolutely to the grace that is in Him, for the present, and for what may lie before us; that, if sanctified to the obedience of Jesus Christ, and seeing it flows from and is alone true of the life we have in Him, we may seek to realise it, not by effort but by abiding in Him. But this abiding in Him

must be *where* He is, and dwelling there in heart and spirit with Him, we shall be formed by the things that are there — the natural home and sphere of the life we possess — so as to live out nothing but that life in a sphere where everything is contrary to it. "I am crucified with Christ: but I live; yet no more I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2: 20). May we each one know more of such a life — Christ become everything as our object to those in whom He is our life. (Col. 3: 11).