

The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1, 5.

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Article 44 of 47 **Short Meditations**

(Cavenagh, 1866.)

Deeply and justly prizing our Authorized Version, yet alterations are at times well suggested — as on this verse, which should rather be, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship to the obedience of faith among all nations."

We might religiously judge that nothing could be more acceptable, to God, than the services of *love*. We should be quite ready to admit, that mere conformity with *law*, or the observance of commands, would not do for Him; but we should feel at the same time, that the services and renderings of love must be enough.

In this, however, we should greatly err. The service of love is not the thing. It is "the obedience of *faith*," (as Romans 1: 5 speaks,) that is looked for from us sinners.

We must remember this to His glory, and our comfort.

We have a passing intimation of this in Luke 7. The sinner of the city that is introduced there, was a fervent lover of the Lord. Nothing in her esteem was too good for Him — she gave Him herself, and the treasures of her house. He valued and enjoyed her love. Surely He did. But He recognized her faith at the end, when He came to dismiss her; "Thy faith hath saved thee," He says to her; "go in peace."

So, in John 11. The Lord is there in the midst of the dearest affections. The scene is laid at Bethany, the spot dearest to Him of any on the face of the earth, the place which had then superseded Jerusalem in His affections, for He was dealing *personally*, and not *dispensationally* with the materials around Him. But even then and there, He trains them that loved Him, to faith in Him. He would have them apprehend His glory, *His glory for them*, and could not rest in *their love for Him*.

And this same mind is still more vividly and largely expressed in the scenes which we witness after His resurrection.

Love took the women to the sepulchre in Luke 24, but the Angel rebukes them for want of faith. The disciples going to Emmaus were sad. They had lost, as they judged, their hope and One whom they loved. But the Lord now, as His Angel before, rebukes this want of faith. And so, the company in Jerusalem, in the same chapter. The Lord conducts them, loving Him as indeed they did, into the *faith* of the *fact* and of the *meaning* of His resurrection.

So, in John 21. Magdalene is alone at the sepulchre in deep, personal, fervent affection. But the Lord is not satisfied. He values it, I am right sure; but she must know Him better, apprehending Him by faith, as well as give Him these earnest services of love. He therefore reveals Himself to her as risen, and as risen for the sake of His brethren. That is, she must know Him in His grace and service, and not herself and her love. She must have faith of His perfect love for His own, and not merely be bringing the fruit of her love to Him. So, in the same chapter, the disciples in the city were glad when they saw Him — glad, because they loved Him. But He sets Himself at once to instruct them in His resurrection and the results of it, the results of it to themselves and other sinners. He tells them of "life" and "peace"

— and then, to the end of the chapter, He challenges faith.

This is so, I am full sure. But I would not, I cannot, but add, that all these instances are abundant to show us, that these affections and services were dear to Him. Ignorant love the heart of Jesus could prize. And He shows it, by those instances of it which I have been looking at. "Signs or tokens will be given to the doubt of love, though denied to the doubt of indifference" — as one has said. True indeed. This loving woman and others shall get signs to dispel their unbelief, as well as rebukes for their unbelief; and this shall tell us, that He prized their love, though He could not rest satisfied with it.

How truly acceptable to our hearts, all this is! We delight to think of the Lord thus prizing the feeble, ignorant movements of the heart towards Him, and letting us know how He answers them, thus, in His grace and gentleness. But surely we may take equal delight in the thought, that while He values our love for Him, He must have us acquaint ourselves with His love for us. He must have *faith* — that principle which trusts Him as a Giver, that principle which makes Him an object in the place and activity of grace, which acknowledges Him in the love that serves us, and not on the throne that exacts of us; which understands this happy Divine secret, that God has found it, as for Himself, "more blessed to give than to receive."

And it is the purpose of the Epistle to the Romans, at least in its doctrinal part, to set forth the excellencies and wonders of *faith*. It is of faith it speaks to us, the faith of a sinner, what it apprehends as its object; and then, what it reaches and enjoys as its inheritance.

Hebrews 11 celebrates faith as the principle by which *a saint* carries on his services and his victories amid the circumstances of life in the world. It is faith which is there set forth in its excellencies; but it is faith in the saints, in the elders, as the saints of earlier days are there called. But in the Epistle to the Romans it is faith in the sinner, that is set forth, not celebrated in its services and victories, or as that secret principle of the soul, by which the saints obtained a good report, but the secret in the soul of a sinner which apprehends wondrous objects, and reaches wondrous blessedness. The faith of *saints* will *be rewarded*: the faith of *sinners* will *sing* for ever. It is there declared to look at the Christ of God delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. What wondrous objects are there presented to its eye, and its acceptance! Nothing less than the most stupendous facts which could ever have been transacted in the wide, wide compass of creation itself; that God should deliver up His own Son to die for sinners, and then raise Him up from the dead, for the justification of all who would receive Him!

Blood upon the Mercy-Seat, or propitiation, is set forth to the view of faith — the grand and blessed mystery, that God is now just while justifying the ungodly.

What objects can fill the eye so great and excellent and marvellous as these! And these are the objects presented to the eye of the faith of sinners. (Rom. 3, 4)

And if the *objects* of faith are thus excellent and wondrous in the highest order of excellences and wonders, so are its *attainments* or the things that it reaches and possesses itself of, according also to the teaching of this Epistle.

"The righteousness of God" is its property. The believing sinner possesses himself of that at once. That righteousness at once constitutes, as I may say, his person. It makes him what he is. It clothes him. It sets him in his due form and personality before God. And who, of His creatures, can be more excellent, than the one who shines before Him as His own righteousness? We are made "the righteousness of God."

And as this is the believing sinner's present possession, as this forms his person, or is himself

now and as he will be for ever, so "the glory of God" is his inheritance, in hope of which he now walks day by day. And if the *person* be excellent, what say we to this *condition*? If nothing higher could form me for the eye of God than His own righteousness, what could make me higher in my estate and circumstances around Him, than His own glory? (Rom. 3, 5)

Have we not, therefore, reached and attained the most marvellous conditions, as well as apprehended the most marvellous objects? Indeed it is so. We look at the Son of God in death and resurrection for us, as delivered up and raised up for our blessing. These are our objects. And then, we shine personally in the righteousness of God, and claim as our estate and inheritance the glory of God. These are our attainments or possessions.

What could have been done more than has been done? If the obedience of faith be *demande*d, it is *encouraged* beyond all that the heart of man could have conceived.

But I must add this — that He who claims our confidence as sinners, has entitled Himself to it. And a most blessed secret of Scripture this is. It demands our faith in Christ, and in the redemption which He has wrought for us; and it reads to us His divine title to this which He challenges.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is, as I may say, the closing, crowning testimony to that. Shall I say, it seals, and seals as for ever, seals as with a seal that can never be questioned or effaced, the blessed One's title to the faith which He claims.

In one aspect of it, that Epistle may be called, God's acceptance of Christ." It sets forth that fact, establishing it in the mouth of the most august witnesses.

Other testimonies had been previously given to the same blessed mystery. I know that. The rent veil at the moment of the death, testified God's acceptance of Christ. Then, the resurrection, as a more public witness, gave evidence of the same. And then, the gift and presence of the Holy Ghost here, fruit of the ascension and glory of Jesus, comes in its way and season, to tell the same great truth. So that in the mouth of these three august witnesses, the rent veil, the resurrection, and the presence of the Holy Ghost down here, the fact is established, that Christ has been accepted, and accepted for us.

But then, after all these, comes this Epistle to do the same service for us, in another and a further way. In that writing, the Spirit opens the heavens; and the heavens thus opened becomes the crowning testimony to the same great fact. Because it shows us heaven as the seat of the ascended Jesus, ascended and seated there in such characters as suit and answer our necessities. It shows us Jesus there as "the Purger of our sins;" as "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession;" as "the Mediator of the new covenant;" "the Author and Finisher of faith" — and each and all of these characters tell us of God's acceptance of Christ for us.