

The Obedience of Jesus Christ

J McBroom.

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Once we were "in Adam," who disobeyed. Now we are "in Christ," the obedient One. Have we realized what this signifies?

What does this spiritual journey from Adam to Christ mean for us? We are moral agents, and cannot be transferred from one order to another like a log of wood. This journey involves an experience which reaches down to the depths of the soul; but if it be faced it is followed by an enlargement and an enrichment of soul and life that is beyond words. This wonderful transition is shown to us chiefly in the writings of Paul. It is a new relationship, implying not only a new life and nature but a new origin, with a new spiritual constitution — a new creation — the conditions of which are set forth in a Man who is in heaven, the beginning of a new race for God. To be in Christ is to be of Him. To belong to Him is an unspeakably blessed thing, but to be of Him is the most wonderful thing of all. The greatest of angels, it has often been said, would desire such a place. The question for us is do we desire to know it? If so, the Holy Spirit is given to us that we may both know and enjoy it.

The passage of the soul through this transitional state is described in Romans 7. It has been likened to a person in a tunnel, in which every step taken brings him nearer to the light. He begins as carnal and sold under sin, and ends as one who delights in the law of God. In the intensity of his distress he is led to distinguish between himself as divinely operated upon by the Spirit, and the law of sin and death which is in his members. "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me" (vv. 16, 17). Here comes in the necessity for some abstract thinking, and so he concludes in verse 22 with, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." The journey is made. He delights in the good. Sin, however present and powerful, is not himself but a foreign element from which he is set free by "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 2).

An important stage of soul history is reached at this point. When he says, "I delight in the law of God," he is using the very words that would apply to our Lord, as Psalm 1: 2 shows. True, there could be no "after the inward man" with Him, nor indeed what follows here, for He was altogether for God in sinless and stainless Humanity. Here we recognise not only the complex condition created by the work of the Spirit in us, but that the Spirit is the new power for working through us the obedience of Jesus Christ. Here surely is a note of triumph. The law with its stern commandments had brought him into death, "for I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me and by it slew me" (Rom. 7: 9-11).

Here observe how the Cross in all its blessedness comes in for the soul's relief. "Death and the curse were in our cup." Both have been borne by our Substitute: the judgment of our sins borne, and sin in the flesh condemned in the death of the-sinless One, our great and glorious Substitute. We appropriate that death as ours and pass from under judgment into His risen life, where there can be no condemnation. Having been our Substitute on the Cross, He can now be our Representative in the glory. Our old state is judged and He who accomplished it is risen in a new order of life, and we are in Him there. That this may be a divinely accomplished reality, He has given us of His Spirit. "If any one

has not the Spirit of Christ he is not of Him" (Rom. 8: 9 New Trans.) No words can adequately describe the blessedness of all this: its fittingness for God in the defeat of every opposing force, the perfect conciliation of all that He is in nature and character in the blessing of man, the bringing of it all to pass in His blessed Son by incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension, with the coming of the Spirit to make it good in our souls, so that we can be in a new order, a new creation now, and be consciously transferred from the fallen man to the Man of God's purpose to delight in Him and be able by His grace and the Spirit's power to walk as He walked and obey as He obeyed.

The obedience of Jesus Christ, then, is specific. It is not to be found as coming from the Adamic order, whether innocent or fallen. It stands by itself, and can be compared with nothing in the whole circle of nature. No imitation or counterfeit or mixture is possible. It flows from the divine nature, and is so linked up with its source in the Godhead that it passes from the thought of responsibility to that of holy and happy response — that is, from a necessary moral obligation to a natural outflow. Responsibility is there, but in the background. A new life and nature finds its natural delight in pleasing its Object, that Object being the Father whose love has made us His beloved children.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons [children] of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not" (1 John 3: 1). God has so wrought that the feelings, tastes and joys are the same in the subject as in the Object; and being maintained as proper to the relationship, they are reciprocated in happy and holy communion. So in the first Epistle of John believers are taken account of as the offspring of God, a new generation in the earth, and it goes so far as to say that they cannot commit sin. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit [practice] sin; for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." It is impossible to connect sin with the new life. Should failure come in, as shown in 1 John 2: 1, there is the Advocacy of Christ in view of recovery. There we are viewed in the concrete as in our present condition, but here we are seen in the abstract blessedness of the life of God as a new generation, so that sin is impossible.

What a relationship is this, and what a place before our God it puts us in; the sweetness and blessedness of intimacy and nearness, brought before the Father in the life nature and calling of the Son in His glorious Manhood. Surely it is becoming that His path and practice should be ours. Moreover, His obedience led to the Cross. He took upon Him the form of a servant and became obedient unto death. This too has its bearing on the believer. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3: 16).

How simple and happy is Christian life in the light of all this. We often speak of difficulties. To be what God has made us, walking by faith and in the Spirit, many things which we call difficulties would be seen in their true light as food for faith, and coming in to provide a channel for the outflow of the life of Christ in us. Difficulties indeed amount to impossibilities for 'the flesh, for the flesh is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be'. If we can say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man," and say with the Apostle, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death," we shall follow on to say, "the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Are we followers of a rejected Christ? If so, it can only rightly be in the life of an accepted Christ in glory. Are we living? If so, goodbye to all that is legal, formal and artificial, and, in fellowship with the Father and the Son let us rejoice in the blessedness of being here in these closing apostate days as heavenly ones, separated to the obedience of Jesus Christ, in the enjoyment of the things of God and of heaven.