

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 232

OBEDIENCE

*If ye love me, keep my
commandments.*

John 14:15

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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GOD'S WORD AND OBEDIENCE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

ALL professing Christians are agreed, in theory at least, that it is the bounden duty of those who bear His name to honor and glorify Christ in this world. But as to *how* this is to be done, as to *what* He requires from us to this end, there is wide difference of opinion. Many suppose that honoring Christ simply means to join some “church,” take part in and support its various activities. Others think that honoring Christ means to speak of Him to others and be diligently engaged in “personal work.” Others seem to imagine that honoring Christ signifies little more than making liberal financial contributions to His cause. Few indeed realize that Christ is honored only as we *live holily* unto Him, and that, by walking in subjection to His revealed will. Few indeed really believe that word, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1Sa 15:22).

We are not Christians at all unless we have fully surrendered to and “received Christ Jesus *the Lord*” (Col 2:6). We would plead with you to ponder that statement diligently. Satan is deceiving many to-day by leading them to suppose that they are savingly trusting in “the finished work” of Christ while their hearts remain unchanged and self still rules their lives. Listen to God’s Word: “Salvation is far from the wicked; for they seek not thy statutes” (Psa 119:155). Do you really *seek* His statutes? Do you diligently search His Word to discover what He has commanded? “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:4). What could be plainer than that?

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?” (Luk 6:46). Obedience to the Lord in life, not merely glowing words from the lips, is what Christ requires. What a searching and solemn word is that in James 1:22: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves”! There are many “hearers” of the Word, regular hearers, reverent hearers, interested hearers; but alas, what they hear is not *incorporated* into the life: it does not regulate their way. And God says that they who are not *doers* of the Word are deceiving their own selves!

Alas, how many such there are in Christendom today! They are not

downright hypocrites, but deluded. They suppose that because they are so clear on salvation by grace alone they are saved. They suppose that because they sit under the ministry of a man who has “made the Bible a new book” to them they have grown in grace. They suppose that because their store of biblical knowledge has increased they are more spiritual. They suppose that the mere listening to a servant of God or reading his writings is *feeding on the Word*. Not so! We “feed” on the Word only when we personally appropriate, masticate,¹ and assimilate into our lives what we hear or read. Where there is not an increasing conformity of heart and life to God’s Word, then increased knowledge will only bring increased condemnation. “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luk 12:47).

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2Ti 3:7). This is one of the prominent characteristics of the “perilous times” in which we are now living. People hear one preacher after another, attend this conference and that conference, read book after book on biblical subjects, and yet never attain unto a vital and practical acquaintance with the truth so as to have an impression of its power and efficacy² on the soul. There is such a thing as spiritual *dropsy*,³ and multitudes are suffering from it. The more they hear, the more they want to hear; they drink in sermons and addresses with avidity,⁴ but their lives are unchanged. They are puffed up with their knowledge, not humbled into the dust before God. The faith of God’s elect is “the acknowledging [in the life] of the truth which is after godliness” (Ti 1:1); but to this, the vast majority are total strangers.

God has given us His Word not only with the design of instructing us, but for the purpose of directing us: to make known what He requires us to *do*. The first thing we need is a clear and distinct knowledge of our duty; and the first thing God demands of us is a conscientious practice of it, corresponding to our knowledge. “What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic 6:8). “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc 12:13). The Lord Jesus affirmed the same thing when He said, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14).

¹ **masticate** – chew.

² **efficacy** – power to produce a desired effect.

³ **dropsy** – thirst or craving that is impossible to satisfy.

⁴ **avidity** – extreme eagerness or enthusiasm.

A man profits from the Word as he discovers God's *demands upon him*, His undeviating⁵ demands; for He changes not. It is a great and grievous mistake to suppose that in this present dispensation⁶ God has *lowered* His demands, for that would necessarily imply that His previous demands were harsh and unrighteous. Not so! "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom 7:12). The sum of God's demands is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deu 6:5); and the Lord Jesus repeated it in Matthew 22:37. The apostle Paul enforced the same when he wrote, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema⁷" (1Co 16:22).

A man profits from the Word when he discovers *how entirely and how sinfully he has failed to meet God's demands*. And let us point out for the benefit of any who may take issue with the last paragraph that no man can see what a sinner he is, how infinitely short he has fallen of measuring up to God's standard, until he has a clear sight of the exalted demands of God upon him! Just in proportion as preachers *lower* God's standard of what He requires from every human being, to that extent will their hearers obtain an inadequate and faulty conception of their sinfulness, and the less will they perceive their need of an almighty Savior. But once a soul really perceives what God's demands upon him are and how completely and constantly he has failed to render Him His due, *then* does he recognize what a desperate situation he is in. The Law must be preached before any are ready for the gospel.

A man profits from the Word when he is taught therefrom that *God, in His infinite grace, has fully provided for His people's meeting His own demands*...The Lord Jesus has not only vicariously⁸ satisfied the requirements of God's righteousness for His people, but He has also secured that they shall personally satisfy them too. Christ has procured the Holy Spirit to make good in them what the Redeemer wrought for them.

The grand and glorious miracle of salvation is that the saved are *re-generated*.⁹ A transforming work is wrought within them. Their un-

⁵ **undeviating** – steady; not turning or changing.

⁶ **dispensation** – stage of the outworking of God's purpose.

⁷ **Anathema** – cursed; "What is probably implied is exclusion from the Christian fellowship, implying destruction by God when Christ returns." (Ellingworth & Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, 382)

⁸ **vicariously** – by means of suffering in the place of another.

⁹ See FGB 202, *The New Birth*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

derstandings are illuminated, their hearts are changed, their wills are renewed. They are made “new creatures in Christ Jesus” (2Co 5:17). God refers to this miracle of grace thus: “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10). The heart is now inclined to God’s Law: a disposition has been communicated to it that answers to its demands; there is a sincere desire to perform it. And thus the quickened soul is able to say, “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Psa 27:8). Christ not only rendered a perfect obedience unto the Law for the justification¹⁰ of His believing people, but He also merited for them those supplies of His Spirit that were essential unto their sanctification and that alone could transform carnal creatures and enable them to render acceptable obedience unto God. Though Christ died for the “ungodly” (Rom 5:6), though He *finds* them ungodly (Rom 4:5) when He justifies them, yet He does not *leave them* in that abominable state. On the contrary, He effectually teaches them by His Spirit to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Ti 2:12). Just as weight cannot be separated from a stone or heat from a fire, so cannot justification from sanctification.¹¹

When God really pardons a sinner in the court of his conscience, under the sense of that amazing grace the heart is purified, the life is rectified,¹² and the whole man is sanctified. Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of [not “careless about”] good works” (Ti 2:14). Just as a substance and its properties, causes and their necessary effects are inseparably connected, so are a saving faith *and* conscientious obedience unto God. Hence, we read of “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26).

The Lord Jesus said, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (Joh 14:21). Not in the Old Testament, the Gospels, or the Epistles does God own anyone as a lover of Him save the one who keeps His commandments. Love is something more than sentiment or emotion; it is a principle of action, and it expresses itself in something more than honeyed expressions, namely, by deeds that please the object loved. “For this is the love of God, that

¹⁰ **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) See FGB 187, *Justification*.

¹¹ **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live to righteousness. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34) See FGB 215, *Sanctification*.

¹² **rectified** – made right.

we keep his commandments” (1Jo 5:3). Oh, my reader, you are deceiving yourself if you think you love God and yet have no deep desire and make no real effort to walk obediently before Him.

But what is obedience to God? It is far more than a mechanical performance of certain duties. I may have been brought up by Christian parents and under them acquired certain moral habits, and yet my abstaining from taking the Lord's name in vain and being guiltless of stealing may be no obedience to the Third and Eighth Commandments. Again, obedience to God is far more than conforming to the conduct of His people. I may board in a home where the Sabbath is strictly observed; and out of respect for them or because I think it is a good and wise course to rest one day in seven, I may refrain from all unnecessary labor on that day, and yet not keep the Fourth Commandment at all! Obedience is not only subjection to an external law, but it is the surrendering of my will to the authority of another. Thus, obedience to God is the heart's recognition of His lordship—of His right to command and my duty to comply. It is the complete subjection of the soul to the blessed yoke of Christ.

The obedience that God requires can proceed only from a heart that *loves* Him. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord” (Col 3:23). The obedience that springs from a dread of punishment is servile.¹³ The obedience that is performed in order to procure favors from God is selfish and carnal. But spiritual and acceptable obedience is cheerfully given: it is the heart's free response to and gratitude for the unmerited regard and love of God for us.

We profit from the Word when we not only see it is our bounden duty to obey God, but *when there is wrought in us a love for His commandments*. The “blessed” man is the one whose “delight is in the law of the Lord” (Psa 1:2). And again we read, “Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments” (Psa 112:1). It affords a real test for our hearts to face honestly the questions, “Do I really value His ‘commandments’ as much as I do His promises? Ought I not to do so?” Assuredly, for the one proceeds as truly from His love as does the other. The heart's compliance with the voice of Christ is the foundation for all practical holiness.

Here again we would earnestly and lovingly beg the reader to attend closely to this detail. Any man who supposes that he is saved and yet has no genuine love for God's commandment is deceiving himself. Said the Psalmist, “O how love I thy law!” (Psa 119:97). And again,

¹³ **servile** – cringing, acting like a slave.

“Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold” (Psa 119:127). Should someone object that *that* was under the Old Testament, we ask, “Do you intimate that the Holy Spirit produces a lesser change in the hearts of those whom He now regenerates than He did of old?” But a New Testament saint also placed on record, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). And, my reader, unless *your* heart *delights* in the “law of God,” there is something radically wrong with you; yea, it is greatly to be feared that you are spiritually dead.

A man profits from the Word when his heart and will are yielded to *all* God’s commandments. Partial obedience is no obedience at all. A holy mind declines whatsoever God forbids and chooses to practice all He requires without any exception...A person who has no principle of holiness in him may yet be disinclined to many vices and be pleased to practice many virtues, as he perceives the former are unfit actions and the latter are, in themselves, comely actions; but his disapprobation¹⁴ of vice and approbation of virtue do not arise from any disposition to *submit to the will of God*.

True spiritual obedience is *impartial*. A renewed heart does not pick and choose from God’s commandments: the man who does so is not performing *God’s* will, but his own. Make no mistake upon this point: if we do not sincerely desire to please God in *all* things, then we do not truly wish to do so in anything. Self must be denied; not merely some of the things that may be craved, but self itself! A willful allowance of any known sin breaks the whole law (Jam 2:10-11). “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Psa 119:6). Said the Lord Jesus, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14). If I am not His friend, then I must be His *enemy*; there is no other alternative (*see* Luk 19:27).

We profit from the Word when the soul is moved to *pray earnestly for enabling grace*. In regeneration, the Holy Spirit communicates a nature that is fitted for obedience according to the Word. The heart has been won by God. There is now a deep and sincere desire to please Him. But the new nature possesses no inherent power, and the old nature or “flesh” strives against it, and the devil opposes. Thus, the Christian exclaims, “To will is present with me; but how to *perform* that which is good I find not” (Rom 7:18). This does not mean that he is the slave of sin, as he was before conversion; but it means

¹⁴ **disapprobation** – moral disapproval; condemnation.

that he finds not how fully to realize his spiritual aspirations.¹⁵ Therefore does he pray, “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight” (Psa 119:35). And again, “Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:133)...The Christian’s desire is to obey God in all things, to be completely conformed to the image of Christ. But this will only be realized in the resurrection. Meanwhile, God for Christ’s sake graciously accepts the will for the deed (1Pe 2:5). He knows our hearts and sees in His child a genuine love for and a sincere desire to keep all His commandments, and He accepts the fervent longing and cordial endeavor in lieu of an exact performance (2Co 8:12). But let none who are living in willful disobedience draw false peace and pervert to their own destruction what has just been said for the comfort of those who are heartily desirous of seeking to please God in all the details of their lives...Many desire to escape from hell, yet their desires are not sufficiently strong to bring them to hate and turn from that which must inevitably bring them to hell, namely, *willful sinning against God*. Many desire to go to heaven, but not so that they enter upon and follow that “narrow way” that alone leads there. True spiritual desires use the means of grace and spare no pains to realize them and continue prayerfully pressing forward unto the mark set before them.

We profit from the Word when we are, even now, *enjoying the reward of obedience*. “Godliness is profitable unto all things” (1Ti 4:8). By obedience we purify our souls (1Pe 1:21). By obedience we obtain the ear of God (1Jo 3:22), just as disobedience is a barrier to our prayers (Isa 59:2; Jer 5:25). By obedience we obtain precious and intimate manifestations of Christ unto the soul (Joh 14:21). As we tread the path of wisdom (complete subjection to God), we discover that “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Pro 3:17). “His commandments are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3), and “in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa 19:11).

From “The Scriptures and Obedience” in *Profiting from the Word*,
available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



¹⁵ **aspirations** – earnest desires or longings.

GOD'S GOSPEL AND OBEDIENCE

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.—Acts 5:30-32

I want [to deal with] that last part of the statement in verse 32: “We are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” That is how Peter’s sermon ends. And our treatment of this paragraph, this message, cannot end without the same vital emphasis. Peter was not merely making a statement to the authorities: he was out to convince them and to help them. He was out to win them, though they had put themselves in a position of enmity against him and all the other apostles. The members of the Sanhedrin¹ were acting in a very unjust and unrighteous manner; and because the apostles were concerned about them, they pleaded with them. By saying, “the God of our fathers,” Peter was calling upon their knowledge of the Scriptures, in this way making use of an argument that he trusted would appeal to them. The apostles were anxious that these men should have the gift of the Holy Spirit, even as they had.

The apostles were what they were and were able to do what they were doing *because of the Holy Spirit*. And Peter was telling the members of the Sanhedrin that they might be the same if they had the same gift. But there was one condition: *obedience*. “So is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that *obey* him.” In other words, Peter was calling for a response. And this is a vital part of the Christian message.

Let me therefore put it in this way: the gospel is to be obeyed. Let us be clear about this. Some people misunderstand these words spoken by Peter and think they mean that if you obey God, if you keep the commandments, if you live a good life, you will be rewarded with the gift of the Holy Spirit. But they cannot mean that because that is the exact *opposite* of the gospel, as I will show you. None of us is rewarded by God for what we have done. It is all of grace. It is all the

¹ **Sanhedrin** – highest court of justice and the supreme council in ancient Jerusalem.

free gift of God. So Peter is really saying here that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who have *believed* the gospel. The obedience is an obedience *to* the gospel.

I start, then, with the first proposition: The gospel² of Jesus Christ, this message, is something that is to be obeyed. This is stated in many places in the Bible. In the apostle Paul's introduction to his letter to the Romans, he talks about himself as a preacher and an apostle and says, "By whom [the Lord Jesus Christ] we have received grace and apostleship"—what for?—"for obedience to the faith among all nations" (1:5). That is Paul's way of describing how people become Christians: they give obedience to the faith.

In another place, Paul says, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom 10:3). He is breaking his heart, he says, about his fellow countrymen, the Jews: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (10:1). Here he is, a Jew himself, and preaching the gospel to Gentiles who are believing it and crowding into the kingdom; but the bulk of his own nation are rejecting it. The Pharisees and scribes, the Sadducees and others are bitterly opposing it. He says, "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (10:2). They are, he says, busy doing this, that, and the other all over the world to establish their own righteousness; but they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.

This teaching is put still more explicitly in Romans 10:13-16. Here Paul says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Then he takes up a series of questions. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" And then he says, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel." Notice how Paul puts it. He does not say they have not all believed the gospel, but that they have not all *obeyed* it.

It is not possible to avoid this word *obey*. And at the very end of the Epistle to the Romans, where Paul is talking about the gospel, he says, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation

² See FGB 198, *The Gospel*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (16:25-26)...

The need for obedience, this great point that is made here by Peter at the end of his address to the Sanhedrin, is a most important matter. The gospel is not something that we listen to in a detached manner. People say, “Well, yes, I’m interested in your gospel. I’m interested in all religions. I’ve read about other religions, and I like to read about Christianity too. I see that one has this, and others have that, and I like to evaluate them. There’s a bit of good, of course, in all religions; and I grant you there is something about this Christian religion too.” No—it is not merely a matter of opinion.

Nor is the gospel something that you and I may simply enjoy listening to. There are things about this gospel that make one admire it tremendously. But the gospel is not even to be admired...The gospel calls for a *response*. It calls for *action*...It calls for *obedience*. The gospel of Jesus Christ is meant to affect the whole of one’s life. It is meant to be the controlling, the central thing in life, that which governs the whole of one’s outlook. That is what is meant by the word *obedience*.

Now, there is a statement in Romans 6:17 that again puts it very well: “God be thanked,” says the apostle, “that ye were the servants of sin [the slaves of sin], but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” Some commentators say, and I think quite rightly, that here Paul is really using an illustration. They say that the words, “you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” should really be translated, “you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine into which you have been delivered.”

The illustration is this: Imagine a lot of molten metal—iron or steel perhaps—that a craftsman wants to form into a particular article. What does he do? Well, he pours the molten metal into a mold; and then as the metal cools, it hardens in the form of the mold. And that, according to the apostle, is what happens when men and women become Christians. Christians are people who have been poured into the mold of the gospel, which means that they have taken on the appearance and the size and the shape of that mold. And this is vital.

Indeed, I go one step further. The teaching on obedience tells us that anything short of such a result is of no value. There is no point in saying that you think the Christian faith is wonderful and that you

admire it unless it has made a difference to you. It is either the controlling factor in your life or else it is nothing. Now you may say, "I don't agree with that because oftentimes when I've listened to it, I've been affected and have really been determined to live a better life; and I have tried to do that"...*But [that] is not enough!* The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Christians are people who have obeyed the gospel. They have been poured into the mold. They are governed, controlled, and determined entirely by this teaching: "... the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that *obey* him."

But now let me ask, "Why is this so? Why the necessity for obedience?" And here we come, of course, to another vital matter in connection with the gospel of salvation. Obedience is essential because the very essence of sin is *disobedience* to God: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). The Bible describes sin as the transgression of the Law, as breaking God's Law. Sin occurs when men and women do not conform to the mold in which God made them. God made them in His own image and likeness. That is the mold. But they have broken the mold and have rebelled against God. To put it another way, they have defaced the image.

Now, it is absolutely essential, it is the necessary preliminary to the gospel that we should realize what sin is. We must not think of sin as merely doing something that is wrong. That is what we tend to do. We recognize certain acts as good and others as bad, and we tend to think that sin is just doing particular things that are bad. It *is* that, but that is not its essence. I repeat that the essence of sin is rebellion against God.

It is very important that we should be clear about the nature of sin, because if sin were merely a matter of committing particular types of actions, many people would feel that they were not sinners at all. Indeed, I have met many such people. They really do not think they are sinners. Some of them have even told me that. I remember a lady saying to me once, "You know, I've never really *felt* that I'm a sinner." And another lady, who used to attend my church—with a very critical attitude, I understand—once said about me, "This man preaches to us as if we were sinners!" She had never got drunk. She had never committed adultery. She had never committed murder. Therefore, she was not a sinner.

Let me use an illustration. There is all the difference in the world between the symptoms of diseases and the diseases themselves. How do you decide whether or not a man is ill? Well, there are some peo-

ple who say, “If you show me a man with a temperature of 105, I’ll say he’s ill. A man who is delirious is ill.” And if you show them somebody who has no raised temperature at all—it may even be subnormal—and who is not delirious but is lying quietly and placidly on the bed, they will say, “There’s nothing wrong with that man.” Their idea of illness is something dramatic, something exciting, something flaring, as it were. But that is a very misleading standard. There are diseases that work their way quietly in the system, and you are hardly aware that anything is happening at all. But the disease is progressing. It is not the symptoms that matter, but the disease itself. And it is exactly the same with the whole question of sin.

We tend to think that respectable people cannot be sinners. Take the typical modern man who is not a Christian—the self-contained, decent, moral, good-living man. He does not come to church or read the Gospels. Why not? Because he does not need to. He does not do anything wrong, and so he is not a sinner. But why does he think that? It is because he has never understood that the essence of sin is rebellion against God.

Here is your respectable man, spending Sunday in his garden, perhaps with his children. Perhaps he has a tennis court or even a swimming pool. He is never drunk; he is loyal to his wife; he is perfectly honest in his business dealings. But has he thanked God for this day, for the sunshine? Has he lifted up his voice and his heart with others in acclaiming the great and glorious Creator? Is he living life to the glory of God, according to the mold in which men and women were originally made? No! He is self-contained and self-satisfied—and he has broken God’s Law just as much as the drunkard, the wife-beater, or the adulterer. He is as abominable in the sight of God as any **flagrant**³ sinner.

Nor, in spite of what people seem to think, is sin merely that which makes us sad. Because they are miserable after they have done certain wrong things, people look for help. They go to one another. They go to preachers. They try the cults and various other treatments, psychotherapy, and so on. They long to be delivered from their misery, from whatever it is that is getting them down. They say, “I keep on falling into this thing; can’t you help me?”

I often find that it is extremely difficult to get such people to stop talking about their misery and their failure and to see themselves in

³ **flagrant** – outrageously bad.

the sight of God. I generally bring it home to them by putting it like this: "If you could get rid of this, you would be all right, would you?"

And they always reply, "Yes, I would."

"Well, then," I say, "you probably won't get rid of this until you come to see that the real trouble is not this particular thing that gets you down and makes you miserable afterward. Your trouble is that you haven't even thought of God. He has never entered into your calculations, and you're not concerned at all about obeying Him and pleasing Him and living to His glory. That is sin."

This is the way to look at the problem of sin. God is the one Who made us. He is the controller of all life. He made men and women for Himself. He made them according to His mold, His pattern, in His image and likeness, and He made them like that so that they might be His companions, that He might enjoy their company...He has made men and women for Himself. And He intended them to live according to His pattern and Law. But they have refused. They have rebelled against Him. They have smashed the mold. They say they do not need God and they can make their own lives. So they do not obey Him. That, I repeat, is the essence of sin...Men and women are in trouble because of their disobedience to God. As a result, they are under the wrath of God.

And it is at this point that the gospel comes in—it is exactly as the apostles stated here to the Sanhedrin. "Listen," they said, "you are telling us to stop preaching. You are telling us not to teach anymore in the name of this man or to do anything more in His name. But we must. We cannot keep silent. Why? Because God has commanded us, and 'we ought to obey God rather than men.' We have been sent by God"...

What is this message that has been given to us? It is a message about God and His Son. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand [of power] to be a Prince and a Saviour." This is the message, and here are the apostles preaching it to the Sanhedrin. "Listen," they said in effect, "you rejected Him, but you didn't know what you were doing. We are [proclaiming] Him to you. We are appealing to you. Can't you see? He is Prince; He is Savior; He is God's way of salvation. You can be forgiven; you can have new life; you can have the gift of the Spirit, if only you believe this message and obey it."

The gospel, therefore, is also a *command*. It is just as much a command from God as the Ten Commandments. Does that come to you

as a surprise? It should not. God commands men to go out and preach it, and He commands men and women to believe it. So, believe the gospel. I say again: it is His commandment...What, then, are the commands that are to be obeyed?

Well, the first command is to *repent*...But what does repentance⁴ mean? First, just as Paul urged upon the Athenians, and Peter upon the Sanhedrin, repentance means that you stop for a moment and think about your life. It means that you stop living from day to day and hand to mouth and stop being governed by what happens to you. Instead of living as if you have an endless lease on life and will never have to die, you stop. You think. You meditate. You ask, “What am I? How am I living? What is the purpose of it all? What is the end?” And when you have started thinking, you see that you have a soul. It is then that you begin to realize the truth about God.

Now when you repent, you realize that you have spurned God and that He calls you to account. He has a right to do that. As the psalmist says, “It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Psa 100:3). Our times and our lives are in His hands; He is the Judge, and not we ourselves. And having realized this, you confess that you are wrong and that you have been a rebel against God. You see that you have spat upon His Law and desecrated His sanctities;⁵ you see that you are vile—a reprobate,⁶ a sinner—and you acknowledge it without defending yourself. You realize that there is nothing to be said for you at all, and you acknowledge that you deserve nothing but punishment. You have flouted the Law of God Who has given you everything you have ever enjoyed—the gift of life, health and strength, food and clothing, your birth into a family that surrounded you with love and care and attention. God has given you all this, and you have turned away from Him.

But now you fall before God in utter acknowledgment of your rebellion and your sin. “There’s no defense,” you say. And you cry out to Him for mercy. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord,” says Paul, “shall be saved” (Rom 10:13). And those who obey the command to repent begin to call on the name of the Lord. There is nothing to be done but to cry to God for mercy and compassion, for forgiveness, for love. We are commanded to do this: “God commandeth all men every where to repent” (Act 17:30).

⁴ See FGB 203, *Repentance*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁵ **desecrated His sanctities** – disregarded God’s holy character and defiled God’s holy truths.

⁶ **reprobate** – morally corrupt person.

And then, second, God commands us to *believe* this gospel. He says, “I am setting this message before you. I first of all raised up My Son Jesus as the Savior. I sent Him from heaven and made Him, Who was with Me in eternity, into flesh. I sent Him as a man ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom 8:3). I caused Him to humble Himself in order to save you. Then I raised up preachers and told these men to hold My Son before you.”

So when God commands us to believe the gospel, He means us to believe this record, this witness of the apostles, that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than the only begotten, eternal Son of God. “We are his witnesses of these things,” says Peter, “and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Act 5:32). Obey what? Obey the message concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter had preached Him on the Day of Pentecost, and three thousand people had obeyed the message. They had believed the truth concerning this Jesus, that He is the Son of God, that He is God’s own way of salvation, that God sent Him to the cross, that God put all our sins on Him and punished them in Him. Do you believe that? That is obedience to the gospel.

And then, do you believe that though Jesus of Nazareth was buried, He rose again in the body on the third day? That is the proof that He is God and not only man. He ascended into heaven; He is seated at the right hand of God; [He] will come again to judge all His enemies and to set up His kingdom of glory and of grace. Do you believe that? That is what God commands us to do.

But to be more particular, God commands you to believe that in His Son—and in Him alone—is salvation. He commands you to believe what is called the doctrine of justification by faith only,⁷ which means that those who obey the gospel believe that here and now, without any delay whatsoever, they can become Christians.

“But surely,” says someone, “I can’t become a Christian in a moment. I must go out and live a better life. I must start reading my Bible. I must start to pray. I must do this, that, and the other.”

No, no, my friend; if you say that, you have not obeyed the gospel because it means that you regard Jesus as just a teacher who tells you how to save yourself. And that is a contradiction of the gospel. The gospel states that it is what *He* has done that saves: His death upon the cross, His rising again in the resurrection, and [His] presenting

⁷ See FGB 187, *Justification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Himself on our behalf...To believe [this] gospel means that you stop all self-justification, every reliance upon your good deeds, your own efforts. You see that God justifies not the godly, but the ungodly. As Christ put it, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick...I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mat 9:12–13). If you do not come as you are, you do not obey the gospel.

You do not impress God at all if you say, "I see now that I have been forgetting You and ignoring You. I have been breaking Your commandments; so I have decided, I am determined, to live a better life from now on. I am going to live in obedience to Your commandments." If you say that to God, He will tell you that you are now disobeying Him more than you have ever done in the whole of your life.

Why is that? It is because He has told you that He has raised up His Son Jesus "to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Act 5:31). He has told you that He has done what you cannot possibly do for yourself, and if you do not accept what He has done, then you are disobeying Him. You must say, "I don't understand, but I believe, and I am coming to You in obedience to Your commands." You must cast yourself utterly and entirely upon the Word of God. That is obedience to the gospel. That is what makes you a Christian...

So I end by asking once more: Have you obeyed this gospel? You have heard it many times, but has it led to anything? Have you conformed to the mold of the gospel? God is holding this gospel before you, and He commands you to believe.

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David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



He who trusts in the merits of Christ alone and has any just sense of
his obligations to the Redeemer, gives much, gives all, and
then wishes he could give more.—*William Plumer*

GOD'S GRACE AND OBEDIENCE

Hugh Martin (1822-1885)

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.—Philippians 2:12-13

THERE is an extraordinary amount of light to be found in Philippians 2:12-13, as to the nature and connection of the divine and human agencies in the sanctification, perseverance, and final salvation of the people of God. The divine agency is asserted as a gracious and blessed fact, the human agency is enjoined as a solemn duty, and the one is made the basis of (or the ground or argument for) calling forth the other.

In the first place, the divine agency is asserted. “It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” “You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins...and hath raised us up together...[in] Christ...according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Eph 2:1, 6; 1:19-20). The ever-blessed God, Who is the self-sufficient One—Who [does not need] you nor your service and can be profited by neither—hath been pleased in His sovereign grace, according to the counsel of His own will and the unprompted beneficence¹ of His own nature, to look upon you in mercy; and in the day of your misery and His power, He said unto you, “Live” (Eze 16:6).

Of His good pleasure, He hath begotten you again by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1Pe 1:3); and, by the renewing might of His Holy Spirit, He hath created you anew in Christ Jesus, as His workmanship—a spiritual man—a holy temple for Himself. And He hath entered His intended habitation; the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you (Rom 8:11). “Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2Co 6:16)...Christ is formed within you and dwelleth there by faith (Gal 4:19). The Holy Spirit, Whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him, hath come, according to the

¹ **beneficence** – goodness and kindness.

promise of Jesus, to abide with you forever. And “ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Joh 14:17). And the Father also is present with you, for ye are interested in the other promise of the Savior: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (Joh 14:23).

It is not to be supposed that the glorious triune Godhead² will spiritually and graciously inhabit a renewed and quickened soul without manifesting the divine presence by operations worthy of the divine nature. The living God in a living soul is not inactive...His mighty power is put forth upon [His regenerated children] in a manner consistent with their nature and to an extent that takes account of all their power. Formerly naturally inclined to evil and to earthliness, their wills are now otherwise bent and directed by Him Who is the Father of their spirits and hath their hearts in His keeping. They are delivered from that yoke of bondage in which they were held when sin had dominion over them, and they fell in with the will of their tyrant and destroyer, being carried captive by the devil at his will (2Ti 2:26). Now molded, strengthened, sanctified by the Spirit of God, their will is in harmony with God's: they are willing in a day of His power (Psa 110:3), for He worketh in them to will.

And, again, naturally without strength, as was their state when in due time Jesus died for them, they are now filled by the indwelling Spirit with newborn power and energy. They are strengthened with all might in the inner man; and they are enabled to say, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:24). God worketh in them also *to do*. For, now that they are inclined to the path of holy and heavenly aspiration and obedience, they are not left utterly without power to follow out the dictates of a renewed and regenerated will. Nor is He, Who hath given them a new heart, left to receive at their hands merely the will for the deed, but He gives the deed also: He communicates the power as well as the inclination. He both persuades and enables. He gives them both the willing heart and an able hand for His service. He graciously “worketh in them both to will and to do.” In this way, the text asserts the agency of God in the preservation and perseverance of His people.

In the second place, the human agency is enjoined, as distinctly as the divine agency is affirmed. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Think it not enough that you have found grace to

² See FGB 231, *The Triune God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

enter in at the strait³ gate: run with patience the race set before you. Think it not enough that you have been reconciled freely by the blood and regenerated powerfully by the Spirit of Christ: learn daily to put off the old man (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), to die daily unto sin, and live more and more unto righteousness. Account not your restoration to the favor and the family of God to be your full and your final salvation. You have but found the right direction and the right path—follow on to know the Lord. Evil still dwells within you and must be subdued and extirpated.⁴ Satan still tempts and must be resisted and overcome; ungodliness has a strange...power over the children of men and will cast its withering spell over you again, if ye be not watchful to set the Lord always before you and walk humbly with Him. Wrestle for the mastery; labor for the Bread of Life. Grow in grace: be instant in prayer, search the Scriptures, do good as ye have opportunity. Be patient in tribulation, part with every idol, do all to the glory of God. Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus (Phi 3:14). Hold that fast which thou hast (Rev 3:11). Look that ye lose not the things that ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward (2Jo 1:8). Endure steadfast to the end. Work out and work off from your nature the sin that cleaves so closely to the inner man. Make your calling and election sure (2Pe 1:10). Gird up⁵ all your energies for a persevering and prolonged—a life-long—conflict, if you would have an abundant entrance administered to you. The stake is great, the prize is noble, the fight is arduous.⁶ No energy you can muster up at all and put forth can be dispensed with. Stand in awe and sin not. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

In the third place, the two clauses that thus constitute one text are so united as to form an argument or step of reasoning. The one is made a ground or basis for the other. The certainty and gracious nature of the agency of God is laid as a foundation for that agency of the Christian's own to which he is here exhorted. The fact that God worketh in His people is assumed as a powerful argument or call or motive for them to work. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for (because) it is God who worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The beautiful connection that is thus established

³ **strait** – so narrow as to make passage difficult.

⁴ **extirpated** – completely destroyed.

⁵ **gird up** – from the idea of binding up a long robe in order to make walking or working easier; therefore, to prepare the mind for action.

⁶ **arduous** – demanding considerable mental effort and skill.

between the effectual and gracious work of God and the solemn and persevering work of the believer himself, first demands our attention.

It will prepare us gradually for understanding the subject if we take notice at the outset of the two objections that have frequently been offered to the doctrine of a divine and irresistible agency, as such an agency is held by us to be concerned in the salvation of sinners. We hold that men are naturally in a state of spiritual death from which they have not power—even the least—to deliver themselves and that all who escape from this condition do so in virtue of an exercise of efficacious⁷ and creating energy put forth upon them by the Spirit of God, whereby the predominance⁸ of the carnal mind is destroyed, the evil principles of their nature in so far subdued, and a spiritual nature communicated to them. [This nature inclines] in its desires and affections to the God Who gave it, insomuch that the subject of this great change infallibly chooses God now for his chief good, returns to Him in repentance and faith, and cleaves to Him with humble and affectionate allegiance. And the Scripture before us affirms that the high place of supremacy that God, by His Spirit, has thus assumed for Himself in and over the soul of His own creature, chosen as the object of redeeming love, is not abandoned after this conversion has been effected, but is still maintained by the same God Who “worketh” there “to will and to do.”

Against this, however, it is objected in the first place that, (1) if one being exerts over another such a mastery and supremacy as is thus assigned to God over the souls of His people, whereby He certainly and invincibly works out His own purposes in them, then the subject of such an operation is not treated as a free and reasonable agent, but as a mere machine, being made the helpless instrument of blindly accomplishing the designs of another.

A variety of answers might be given to show the unfounded and untenable⁹ nature of this objection. I shall ask your attention only to those that are afforded by the text, for this objection is in flagrant contradiction both to the spirit and the letter of this passage.

It is flagrant contradiction to the spirit of the text. [It] contains a solemn exhortation to Christians to watch over and work out their own salvation. [It] supports this exhortation by urging a very solemn motive to obedience. Now, it is not treating a man as a machine to urge

⁷ **efficacious** – able to produce the intended result.

⁸ **predominance** – superior power or influence.

⁹ **untenable** – not able to be defended against objection.

him to the performance of a duty and press on his attention those considerations that ought to determine his line of conduct. It takes for granted that he has an understanding and appeals to it when his faculty of intelligently comprehending what is said to him is sought to be awakened and informed. It supposes he is possessed of a conscience, and to that spiritual power within it entrusts...a sense of obligation in the thing enjoined. It views him as possessed of a will or power of choice and attempts to determine it in the desired direction by the influence of motives that, it is believed, if rightly seen and understood, would secure his concurrence¹⁰ in the end proposed. And it further presupposes him to be endowed with power of action and emotion that will also come into exercise should he follow the course recommended to him. This is not to treat the man as a machine, but as a free and intelligent agent...When we read the first clause of our text, we can reply to the objection that Scripture deals with believers not as machines, but as free and reasonable agents, notwithstanding the supremacy and infallible efficiency of the agency of God within them. But when we read the whole verse and find in what connection and on what grounds Scripture thus exhorts and reasons with its believing readers, we can not only reply that although omnipotent grace be within them, they are not thereby acted on formally and mechanically—but further, that they are dealt with rationally and spiritually precisely because omnipotent grace worketh in them mightily. So this objection is utterly in opposition to the whole scope and spirit of the text.

But, secondly, it is in equally flagrant contradiction to the express language of the text. In describing the nature of the divine agency, the text forever precludes¹¹ the idea of that agency operating on the believer in such a manner as to carry him blind, unconscious, or indifferent in the path of holiness. Indeed, the only possible conception we can entertain of “holiness” is itself enough to set aside any such idea as absolutely inconsistent with itself; [it is] really inconceivable to any mind that will pause and attempt to realize it.

But however this may be, the words before us are so accurately selected with manifest design to prevent the possibility of such a misconception that it is amazing the objection that we are considering should ever have been raised. It is declared in these words that God worketh in His people to *will*: He secures that their own free choice

¹⁰ **concurrence** – cooperation.

¹¹ **precludes** – makes impossible; shuts out.

shall be exercised. He renews and reforms their *desires*: He guides and directs their inclination. In all to the performance of which He carries them, He carries their will also along with Him. He makes them willing in a day of His power. If He wrought in them “to do,” without working in them “to will,” then indeed there might be some color for the allegation that the doctrine of effectual grace supposes man to be dealt with as a machine, for a machine has no will. But if every godly action that God worketh in the Christian is preceded by a godly desire, inclination, and will to do that action, this is exactly the condition that prevents the action from being mechanical...

But again: It is further objected against the doctrine of invincible, prevailing, and controlling grace, that it is calculated to relax the diligence and energy of those who believe themselves the subjects of it. If it be true that the Almighty Spirit of God, dwelling in the Christian, infallibly and effectually secures his sanctification, nothing (it is argued) can be more natural than for the man himself to [release] all his anxiety and sense of responsibility and [lazily] leave to this omnipotent Agent the accomplishment of a work. [He will believe that] any little energy of his can add nothing to that omnipotence already engaged upon it. The doctrine, it is said, will lead to indolence.¹²

In answering this objection, we shall confine ourselves, as in the former case, to the considerations afforded by the text; and we shall find this second objection also to be in direct contradiction to the scope or spirit of the text, as well as to its express terms.

In the first place, then, it surely cannot with any show of reason be asserted that the divine agency is fitted to lead the believer to carelessness... The call addressed to [the believer] is a call to “work.” The motive brought to bear upon him is one designed to set him working. And when such is the exhortation given forth and such the motive applied in the very passage that asserts the efficacy of the grace of God in His people, it surely cannot, without the grossest irreverence, be asserted that grace is fitted to teach them to despise the very exhortation [that] is addressed to them...The exhortation to work is not only contained in the same text that asserts the divine agency, but is made to rest *upon* the assertion of that agency. And not only is a motive to labor pressed upon the Christian although almighty strength is on his side, but the possession of that indwelling and almighty strength is itself made the *motive* that the Spirit of God urges: “Work out your

¹² **indolence** – avoiding activity or exertion; laziness.

salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you”...

But the objection that is thus diametrically opposed to the spirit of the text is a direct denial also of its letter... It is enough to say that where God worketh, He “worketh in you *to do*.” The very thing that the divine agency accomplishes is the expulsion of indolence and indifference, the replenishing of all the active powers with spiritual life, and the directing of them in and towards spiritual action. How, therefore, an operation that from its very nature is intended and calculated to result in the production of energy—an operation that is no otherwise and no further exerted than as it gives birth to energy—how this can beget the contrary inactivity is impossible to comprehend! Hence, indeed, the objection ought not so much to be styled an objection to the doctrine of divine agency, as an utter misconception of that doctrine and a total denial of it in the only sense in which it is affirmed in Scripture (or held by intelligent Christians).

The energetic Christian working out his salvation successfully, you are aware, can take no credit to himself because, according to the doctrine of the text, it is God that worketh in him. But as little can the slumbering Christian, *not* working out his own salvation, take any warrantable comfort because, according to the same doctrine, his inactivity is a proof that God is *not* working in him to will and to do...So little is the doctrine calculated to lead to indolence that it is the direct assertion of the text that the divine agency energizes those who are under its gracious influence; and hence the man who is giving way to indolence and inactivity in the things that pertain to his peace and holiness, ought immediately to take the alarm, being led to feel, by that very token, that the agency is not at work that alone can effectually and finally save him...

O that we knew this divine art of so making our calling and election sure, as to know of a truth that God is in us and with us...He working in us, and we working in and by Him and His mighty power. O what progress, what protection, what bliss might we enjoy! The Lord is His people's portion!

From *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, April 1883.

Hugh Martin (1822-1885): Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian; born in Aberdeen, Scotland, UK.



GOD'S LAW AND OBEDIENCE

Stephen Tyng (1800-1885)

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.—Revelation 22:14

THE salvation that the gospel [proclaims] to man is entirely free. A fundamental principle [of it is this]: it is not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9). God hath saved us, not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy (Ti 3:5). Yet the assurance is uttered with equal solemnity and precision: without holiness, no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). It becomes, therefore, a most important topic for us to consider: What is the worth of man's obedience?...Salvation from sin—offering everlasting life and happiness in that life—is the great promise of the gospel and the object to which the gospel leads our desires and exertions. To attain this blessing, it urges us to forget the things that are behind (Phi 3:13), to count all other things as loss (Phi 3:8), to look not at the things that are seen and are temporal (2Co 4:18). But while it offers this salvation freely through the grace of God, it opens but one path to its attainment—one highway, which is called “The way of holiness” (Isa 35:8). This is presented to us in our text. They who do the commandments of God have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city...A consideration of the worth of man's obedience to the divine commandments requires us to understand *the character under which this obedience is demanded and the effect that it is to produce upon our eternal condition.*

1. It is *not* the meritorious cause of our salvation or the thing for which God saves us in *any* degree. We are saved by grace and not of ourselves. No obedience could have the effect of meriting life but that spotless obedience that the Law requires. The only merit that has deserved and claimed salvation for us—or can do it—is that obedience of the Lord Jesus, which has actually fulfilled the Law. And [it] is offered to us as a free gift of the grace of God when we are perishing under the condemnation of sin...All that God respects in us in the bestowal of this salvation is our need and misery: “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6). This obedience unto death obtained for us a right to the tree of

life and of entrance into the city of God. By this, Jesus has become “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb 5:9). Our own obedience to the commands of God our Savior is *not*, therefore, the consideration for which God bestows upon us eternal life or gives us a right to the security and enjoyment of His people.

2. But though not the meritorious cause of our salvation, it is *the indispensable antecedent¹ and preparation for its completion in eternal glory*. And it is thus required of us. This renewal of our nature in the character of heaven and the likeness of God is the method of our preparation for the enjoyment of the presence of God in heaven...The business of heaven is unqualified and everlasting submission to the will of God. For this, the increasing holiness of the Christian on the earth educates and prepares him more and more. They who have lived and who die unto the Lord rest in the hour of their death from their earthly labors; but their works follow them, not only as the evidence of their character, but as the commencement of that life of perfect obedience to God and cordial delight in His presence and government in which they are to be occupied forever. Jesus is the way that leadeth unto life, and the holiness of His servants is their walking in this way of divine provision. There is no other method in which we may be prepared for glory. He who would delight himself in the eternal contemplation of the majesty and glory of God must not become [accustomed] here to love darkness rather than light or to indulge in works that are evil. Our doing the commandments of God is a travelling onward to His rest—a walking in the way of life. And the worth and influence of this obedience is displayed in the fact that it is of necessity, in the nature of the case, the indispensable preparative and antecedent to the glory that this rest proposes.

3. Obedience to the commandments of God is required of us under the gospel as *a debt of gratitude to Christ and an evidence of our love for Him*. This is the motive to Christian obedience that Jesus offers us when He says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Joh 14:15). True love to Christ will constrain us to live, not unto ourselves, but for Him Who died for us and rose again that He might bring us unto God (1Pe 3:18). We have been bought by Him with a price that we may glorify Him in our bodies and our spirits, which are His. He enjoins it upon us as the argument and evidence of friendship to Him that we follow Him in a life of holiness and endeavor to walk in His steps. He would bind us here by those cords of love that shall hold us

¹ **indispensable antecedent** – absolutely necessary thing that goes before in order.

throughout eternity. He would deal with us, not as vassals and servants whom He can govern as He pleases and order according to His will, but as the chosen companions and friends in whom He will delight forever, and whose hearts He would now attach to that holiness and purity in which He desires them eternally to shine to His honor. Our conformity to Him and imitation of His life is the evidence that He asks of our gratitude for His mercy and our love for His character. If we have been made partakers of His redemption and are one with Him in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, thus, the necessary and constant gratitude of our hearts will display itself. It will be the purpose of our grateful minds to walk in ways of holiness before Him. And the importance of this gratitude for God's unspeakable *gift* indicates the worth and influence of this obedience to the divine commandments, which is required of us under the gospel.

4. Our obedience to the divine commandments is required as *the evidence of our Christian character and of our title to the inheritance of the people of God*. Multitudes may say, "Lord, Lord, open unto us... We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets" (Luk 13:25-26), to whom the reply must be, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mat 7:21). The title to reward—to life eternal—is the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus. "He that hath the Son hath life" (1Jo 5:12). But the evidence that this title has been conferred upon us and that this perfect obedience is made ours through grace is in the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph 4:30). By no other testimony can our title be established. Vain is any assertion of our right to the tree of life or claim of an entrance into the City of God while there is an absence of this one evidence by which the people of God are known. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1Jo 2:6). "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1Jo 3:10). By faith that accepts and rests upon Jesus as our righteousness and redemption, we are justified and made the heirs of glory. But no man can give an evidence of the possession of the faith that justifies in whom there is not an obedience in holiness, a working by love, and a victory over the world. An unholy follower of Jesus is a manifest contradiction... The worth of this evidence of our interest and union with Christ indicates the worth of our obedience to the divine commandments.

Our obedience to the divine law is necessary to bring assurance of salvation to our own hearts. There is no possible method by which a man indulging in voluntary sin can be justly assured of the safety of his own soul. To suppose it possible is to suppose his obtaining assurance of that which has no existence! "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa 57:21). Though man's obedience is not the foundation of his hope, yet his hope is co-ordinate with his obedience. And there can be no hope for a disobedient man...Unless he be converted from his sin and renewed unto holiness in the whole character of his soul, he shall be lost forever. For such a man to retain a fancied security is to be given over to believe a lie. The work of the Spirit upon the heart is the evidence of man's interest in the promises of the Savior and, of necessity, the measure of his own assurance of hope. The worth of his obedience, which the Spirit thus produces in him, is measured therefore by the worth of the assurance of hope, of which it is the evidence and proof. "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1Jo 3:24).

Our obedience to the divine commandments is necessary because this is the absolute command of God. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1Th 4:3). He has absolutely connected man's obedience with man's security; and they cannot be put asunder. He requires us to glorify Him in the good works that He hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10). All that He has desired or revealed, enjoined upon others, or done Himself is that He might make rebellious and unholy beings once more perfect in holiness after His own image. For this His love has labored. For this His grace has been exerted and displayed. For this His power has been manifested...The way of holiness is by the will of God made the way to glory. And the worth and influence of man's obedience under the gospel is displayed in the fact that this is the offering that God requires, and which alone He will accept from man.

We have in these points, clearly set before us, the effect of man's obedience to God upon his eternal condition. The text declares that they who do His commandments have a right to the tree of life and to an entrance through the gates into the city. They are blessed and happy because they are in the possession of this right. It is *not* that their right is *founded upon this obedience*. But this obedience is the evidence of their character, the mark of their condition, the proof that they have received such privileges as the unspeakable gift of God! Were they destitute of this obedience, they could give no evidence of their partnership with Christ in the privileges of His kingdom. And

its worth is manifested in the fact that it is indispensable for the security of their souls and to their possession of life eternal.

Here, then, we see who are the *real candidates for the glory and bliss of the kingdom of God*. They are those who are growing in spiritual holiness, maturing in deep and humble piety, and acquiring daily more of the blessed and lovely spirit of the Redeemer of men. They have been delivered from the condemnation of the Law and from the punishment due to sin, but the Law as [a] rule of life has been written upon their hearts. In conformity to it, they are bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit and have crucified the flesh with its unholy affections and lusts (Gal 5:24). Our confidence in hope and our peace in believing will always rise or fall with the actual conformity of our character to the will of Christ and our watchfulness and devotion to the attainment of this conformity to Christ. We are to grow in grace, if we would abound in consolation and hope. To be with Christ and to [awaken in] His likeness, we must here acquire an entire self-renunciation and a simple union of ourselves with Him. While we thus press forward in the path of obedience, though our infirmities and imperfections are many, yet being of one mind and desiring only to become like Him Whom we love and follow, we are preparing to enter through the gate into the city. The Savior will pass by our infirmities, heal our backslidings, [and] will look to the motive and purpose by which we have been guided, not to the imperfections that have marked the accomplishment of them. He will accept us according to that which we have, while all that we had, has been cheerfully given up for Him. [He] will bid us to come as the blessed of His Father to receive the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Mat 25:34).

From *Lectures on the Law and the Gospel*, Solid Ground Christian Books,
www.solid-ground-books.com.

Stephen Tyng (1800-1885): Episcopalian minister and author; born in Newburyport, MA, USA.



Legalists teach that believers are under the Law, even as it is the covenant of works: Antinomians, on the contrary, assert that believers are not only not under it as a covenant, but not under it even as a rule of duty.

These two assertions are not more contrary to one another,
than they both are to the truth as it is in Jesus.

—*John Colquhoun*

OUR FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.—Hebrews 11:8

THE part of the text to which I shall call your attention lies in these words, “*By faith Abraham obeyed.*” Obedience—what a blessing it would be if we were all trained to it by the Holy Spirit! How fully should we be restored if we were perfect in it! If all the world would obey the Lord, what a heaven on earth there would be! Perfect obedience to God would mean love among men, justice to all classes, and peace in every land. Our will brings envy, malice, war; but the Lord’s will would bring us love, joy, rest, bliss. Obedience—let us pray for it for ourselves and others!

Surely, though we have had to mourn our disobedience with many tears and sighs, we now find joy in yielding ourselves as servants of the Lord: our deepest desire is to do the Lord’s will in all things. Oh, for obedience! It has been supposed by many ill-instructed people that the doctrine of justification by faith is opposed to the teaching of good works¹ or obedience. There is no truth in the supposition.² We preach the obedience of faith. Faith is the fountain, the foundation, and the fosterer³ of obedience. Men obey not God until they believe Him. We preach faith in order that men may be brought to obedience. To disbelieve is to disobey. One of the first signs of practical obedience is found in the obedience of the mind, the understanding, and the heart; and this is expressed in believing the teaching of Christ, trusting His work,⁴ and resting in His salvation. Faith is the morning star of obedience. If we would work the work of God, we must believe on Jesus Christ Whom He hath sent (Joh 6:29).

Brethren, we do not give a secondary place to obedience, as some suppose. We look upon the obedience of the heart to the will of God as salvation. The attainment of perfect obedience would mean perfect salvation. We regard sanctification, or obedience, as the great design

¹ See FGB 199, *Good Works*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² **supposition** – belief held without proof or certain knowledge.

³ **fosterer** – one who nurses and brings up a child.

⁴ See FGB 225, *The Work of Christ*, and 227, *Atonement*.

for which the Savior died. He shed His blood that He might cleanse us from dead works and purify unto Himself a people zealous for good works (Ti 2:14). It is for this that we were chosen: we are elect unto holiness. We know nothing of election to continue in sin. It is for this that we have been called: we are “called to be saints” (Rom 1:7; 1Co 1:2). Obedience is the grand object of the work of grace in the hearts of those who are chosen and called: they are to become obedient children, conformed to the image of the Elder Brother, with Whom the Father is well pleased.

The obedience that comes of faith is of a noble sort. The obedience of a slave ranks very little higher than the obedience of a well-trained horse or dog, for it is tuned to the crack of the whip. Obedience that is not cheerfully rendered is not the obedience of the heart, and consequently is of little worth before God. If the man obeys because he has no opportunity of doing otherwise, and if, were he free, he would at once become a rebel, there is *nothing* in his obedience.

The obedience of faith springs from a principle within and not from compulsion without. It is sustained by the mind’s soberest reasoning and the heart’s warmest passion. The man reasons with himself that he ought to obey his Redeemer, his Father, his God; at the same time, the love of Christ constrains him so to do; thus what argument suggests, affection performs. A sense of great obligation, an apprehension of the fitness of obedience, and spiritual renewal of heart, work an obedience that becomes essential to the sanctified soul. Hence, it is not relaxed in the time of temptation nor destroyed in the hour of losses and sufferings. Life has no trial that can turn the gracious soul from its passion for obedience; and death itself doth but enable it to render an obedience that shall be as blissful as it will be complete. Yes, this is a chief ingredient of heaven: we shall see the face of our Lord and serve Him day and night in His temple. Meanwhile, the more fully we obey at this present, the nearer we shall be to His temple-gate. May the Holy Spirit work in us, so that by faith—like Abraham—we may obey!

I preach to you, at this time, obedience—absolute obedience to the Lord God; but I preach the obedience of a child, not the obedience of a slave; the obedience of love, not of terror; the obedience of faith, not of dread. I shall urge you, as God shall help me, in order that you may come at this obedience, that you should seek after stronger faith, “For by faith Abraham obeyed.”

In every case where the father of the faithful obeyed, it was the result of his faith; and in every case in which you and I shall render

true obedience, it will be the product of our faith. Obedience, such as God can accept, never cometh out of a heart that thinks God a liar; but is wrought in us by the Spirit of the Lord through our believing in the truth, love, and grace of our God in Christ Jesus. If any of you are now disobedient, or have been so, the road to a better state of things is trust in God. You cannot hope to render obedience by the mere forging of conduct into a certain groove or by a personal, unaided effort of the resolution. There is a free-grace road to obedience, and that is receiving by faith the Lord Jesus, Who is the gift of God and is made of God unto us sanctification (1Co 1:30). We accept the Lord Jesus by faith, and He teaches us obedience and creates it in us. The more of faith in Him you have, the more of obedience to Him will you manifest. I was about to say that that obedience naturally flows out of faith, and I should not have spoken amiss; for as a man believeth so is he, and in proportion to the strength and purity of his faith in God, as he is revealed in Christ Jesus, will be the holy obedience of his life. Consider the kind of faith that produces obedience:

It is, manifestly, *faith in God as having the right to command our obedience*. Beloved in the Lord, you know that He is Sovereign, and that His will is law. You [believe] that God—your Maker, your Preserver, your Redeemer, and your Father—should have your unswerving service. We unite, also, in confessing that we are not our own, we are bought with a price (1Co 6:20). The Lord our God has a right to us that we would not wish to question. He has a greater claim upon our ardent⁵ service than He has upon the services of angels; for, while they were created as we have been, yet they have never been redeemed by precious blood. Our glorious Incarnate God⁶ has an unquestioned right to every breath we breathe, to every thought we think, to every moment of our lives, and to every capacity of our being. We believe in Jehovah as rightful Lawgiver and as most fitly our Ruler. This loyalty of our mind is based on faith and is a chief prompter to obedience. Cultivate this feeling *always*. The Lord is our Father, but He is, “our Father which art in heaven” (Mat 6:9). He draws near to us in condescension;⁷ but it *is* condescension, and we must not presume to think of Him as though He were such a one as ourselves. There is a holy familiarity with God that cannot be too

⁵ **ardent** – burning with passion or desire.

⁶ See FGB 219, *The Person of Christ*, and 230, *The Deity of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷ **condescension** – action of descending or stooping to things unworthy.

much enjoyed; but there is a flippant⁸ familiarity with God that cannot be too much abhorred. The Lord is King: His will is not to be questioned; His every word is law. Let us never question His sovereign right to decree what He pleases and to fulfill the decree; to command what He pleases and to punish every shortcoming. Because we have faith in God as Lord of all, we gladly pay Him our homage, and desire in all things to say: “Thy will be done in earth, as it is done in heaven”...May we enter into that true spirit of obedience, which is the unshaken belief that the Lord is right! Nothing short of this is the obedience of the inner man — the obedience which the Lord desires.

Furthermore, we must have *faith in the Lord’s call upon us to obey.* Abraham went out from his father’s house because he [believed] that, whatever God said to others, He had spoken to him, and said, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house” (Gen 12:1). Whatever the Lord may have said to the Chaldeans,⁹ or to other families in Ur,¹⁰ Abraham was not so much concerned with that as with the special word of command which the Lord had sent to his own soul. Oh, that we were most of all earnest to render personal obedience!

It is very easy to offer unto God a sort of “other people’s obedience” — to fancy that we are serving God, when we are finding fault with our neighbors and lamenting that they are not as godly as they ought to be. Truly, we cannot help seeing *their* shortcomings; but we should do well to be less observant of them than we are. Let us turn our magnifying glasses upon ourselves. It is not so much our business to be weeding other people’s gardens as to keep our own vineyard. To the Lord each one should cry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” We, who are His chosen, redeemed from among men, called out from the rest of mankind, ought to feel that if no other ears hear the divine call, our ears must hear it; and if no other heart obeys, our soul rejoices to do so. We are bound with cords to the horns of the altar. The strongest ties of gratitude hold us to the service of Jesus: we must be obedient in life to Him Who, for our sakes, was obedient unto death. Our service to our Lord is freedom: we will to yield to His will. To delight Him is our delight. It is a blessed thing when the inmost nature yearns to obey God, when obedience grows into a habit and be-

⁸ **flippant** – not showing a serious or respectful attitude.

⁹ **Chaldeans** – members of an ancient people who lived in Chaldea c. 800 BC and ruled Babylonia 625-539 BC. They were renowned as astronomers and astrologers.

¹⁰ **Ur** – ancient city in Mesopotamia, home of Abraham before his family’s move to Haran (Gen 11:28, 31).

comes the very element in which the spirit breathes. Surely it should be so with every one of the blood-washed children of the Most High, and their lives will prove that it is so. Others are bound to obey, but we should attend most to our own personal obligation and set our own houses in order. Our obedience should begin at home, and it will find its hands full enough there.

Obedience arises out of a faith that is to us the paramount principle of action. The kind of faith that produces obedience is lord of the understanding, a royal faith. The true believer believes in God beyond all his belief in anything else and everything else. He can say, "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom 3:4). His faith in God has become to him the crown of all his believing, the most assured of all his confidences. As gold is to the inferior metals, such is our trust in God to all our other trusts. To the genuine believer, the eternal is as much above the temporal as the heavens are above the earth. The infinite rolls, like Noah's flood, over the tops of the hills of the present and the finite. To the believer, let a truth be tintured¹¹ with the glory of God, and he values it; but if God and eternity be not there, he will leave these trifles to those who choose them.

You must have a paramount faith in God, or else the will of God will not be a paramount rule to you. Only a reigning faith will make us subject to its power, so as to be in all things obedient to the Lord. The chief thought in life with the true believer is, "How can I obey God?" His great anxiety is to do the will of God, or acceptably to suffer that will; and if he can obey, he will make no terms with God and stand upon no reservations. He will pray, "Refine me from the dross of rebellion, and let the furnace be as fierce as Thou wilt." His choice is neither wealth nor ease nor honor; but that he may glorify God in his body and his spirit, which are the Lord's. Obedience has become as much his rule as self-will is the rule of others. His cry unto the Lord is, "By Thy command I stay or go. Thy will is my will; Thy pleasure is my pleasure; Thy Law is my love."

God grant us a supreme, over-mastering faith; for this is the kind of faith that we must have if we are to lead obedient lives! We must have faith in God's right to rule, faith in the rightness of His commands, faith in our personal obligation to obey, and faith that the command must be the paramount authority of our being. With this faith of God's elect, we shall realize the object of our election, namely, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph 1:4).

¹¹ **tintured** – slightly infused with a trace.

Dear friend, have you this kind of faith? I will withdraw the question as directed to you, and I will ask it of myself. Have I the faith that leads me to obey my God? For obedience, if it be of the kind we are speaking of, is faith in action—faith walking with God; or, shall I say, walking before the Lord in the land of the living? If we have a faith that is greedy in hearing, severe in judging, and rapid in self-congratulation, but not inclined to obedience, we have the faith of hypocrites.¹² If our faith enables us to set up as patterns of sound doctrine and qualifies us to crack the heads of all who differ from us, and yet lacks the fruit of obedience, it will leave us among the “dogs” who are “without” (Rev 22:15). The faith that makes us obey is alone the faith that marks the children of God. It is better to have the faith that obeys than the faith that moves mountains. I would sooner have the faith that obeys than the faith that heaps the altar of God with sacrifices and perfumes His courts with incense. I would rather obey God than rule an empire; after all, the loftiest sovereignty a soul can inherit is to have dominion over self by rendering believing obedience to the Most High.

This much upon faith: “By faith Abraham obeyed”; and by faith only can you and I obey...I leave this word with you. Remember, “By faith Abraham obeyed.” Have faith in God; and then obey, obey, obey, and keep on obeying, until the Lord shall call you home. Obey on earth, and then you will have learned to obey in heaven. Obedience is the rehearsal of eternal bliss. Practice by obedience now the song that you will sing forever in glory. God grant His grace to us! Amen.

From a sermon delivered on Thursday evening, August 21, 1890, at
the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, London.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



The only principle of evangelical obedience is sacred truth and our faith therein. That alone is “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1Ti 6:3) and all acceptable obedience unto God is “the obedience of faith” (Rom 6:26). Whatever men do or pretend unto in a way of duty unto Him, where of the truth of the gospel is not the spring and measure, which is not guided and animated thereby, is not what God at present requireth, not what He will eternally reward.—*John Owen*

¹² See FGB 193, *Hypocrisy*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

OUR LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.—John 14:21-23

THERE is nothing the real Christian desires so much as a personal manifestation of the Lord Jesus. In comparison with this, all other blessings are quite secondary. In order to simplify, let us ask and attempt to answer three questions: *How* does the Savior now “manifest” Himself? What are the *effects* of such manifestation? What are the *conditions* that I have to meet?

In what way does the Lord Jesus now manifest Himself? It is hardly necessary to say, not *corporeally*.¹ No longer is the Word made flesh tabernacling² among men. No more does He say, as He said to Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side” (Joh 20:27). No longer may He be seen by our physical eyes (1Jo 1:1). Nor is the promise of Christ that we are now considering made good through visions. We recall the vision that Jacob had at Bethel, when a ladder was set upon earth, whose top reached unto heaven, upon which the angels of God ascended and descended (Gen 28:12; cf. Joh 1:21). We think of that wondrous vision given to Isaiah, when he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, before which the seraphim cried, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:1-3). No, it is not in visions or in dreams that the Lord promises to come to His people. What then? It is a *spiritual* revelation of Himself to the soul! It is a vivid realization of the Savior’s being and nearness in a deep and abiding sense of His favor and love. “By the power of the Spirit, He makes His Word so luminous,³ that as we read it, He

¹ **corporeally** – in a bodily form.

² **tabernacling** – in poetic language, occupying a tent or tabernacle, i.e., Jesus no longer dwells among men in His human body.

³ **luminous** – full of light, therefore, full of spiritual understanding.

Himself seems to draw near. The whole biography of Jesus becomes in this way a precious reality. We see His form. We hear *His* words.”⁴ It is through the written Word that the incarnate Word “manifests” Himself to the heart!

And what are the effects upon the soul of such a manifestation of Christ? First and foremost, He Himself is made a blessed and glorious reality to us. The one who has been granted such an experience can say with Job, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye⁵ seeth thee” (Job 42:5). Such a one now discerns the surpassing beauty and glory of His person and exclaims, “Thou art fairer than the children of men” (Psa 45:2). Again, such a manifestation of Christ to the soul *assures* us of His *favor*. Now we hear Him saying (through the Scriptures), “As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you.” And now I can respond, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song 2:16). Another consequence of this manifestation of Christ is “comfort and support in trials, especially in those trials, which, on account of their personal nature, are beyond the reach of human sympathy and love—the trials of desertion and loneliness, from which Jesus Himself suffered so keenly; heart trials, domestic trials, secret griefs too sacred to be breathed in the ears of men—all these trials in which nothing can sustain us but the sympathy that His own presence gives.”⁶ Just as the Son of God appeared to the three faithful Hebrews in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:25), so does He now come to those in the place of trial and anguish. So too in the last great trial, should we be called upon to pass through it ere the Savior comes. Then to earthly friends we can turn no longer. But we may say with the Psalmist, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psa 23:4). Now, let us inquire,

What are the terms on which the Savior thus draws near? Surely every Christian reader is most anxious to secure the key to an experience so elevating, so blessed. Listen now to the Savior’s words: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” The faith by which we are saved does not destroy the necessity for an obedient walk. “Faith is the root of which obedience is the beautiful flower and fruit. And it is

⁴ James Inglis, *Way-Marks in the Wilderness*, vol. 4, no. 1 (New York, NY: J. Inglis & Co., 1866), 129.

⁵ That is, the eye of faith.

⁶ Inglis, 134.

only when faith has issued in obedience, in an obedience which stumbles not at sacrifices and halts not when the way is rough and dark; in an obedience that cheerfully bears the cross and shame—it is only then that this highest promise of the gospel is fulfilled...When love for the Savior shall lead us to keep His holy Word—lead us to an immediate, unreserved, unhesitating obedience—lead us to say, in the spirit of entire self-surrender and sacrifice, ‘Thy will, not mine, be done,’ then, farewell to doubt and darkness, to loneliness and sorrow! Then shall we mourn no more an absent Lord. Then shall we walk as seeing Him Who is invisible, triumphant over every fear, victorious over every foe.”⁷

This manifestation of Christ is made only to the one who really loves Him, and the proof of love to Him is not by emotional displays but by submission to His will. There is a vast difference between sentiment⁸ and practical reality. The Lord will give no direct and special revelation of Himself to those who are in the path of disobedience. “He that hath my commandments,” means, hath them at heart. “And keepeth them”—that is the real test. We *hear*, but do we *heed*? We *know*, but are we *doing* His will? “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1Jo 3:18)!

“And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father.” There are three different senses in which Christians may be considered as objects of the loving favor of the Father and of the Son: as persons elected in sovereign grace to eternal life, as persons actually united to Christ by believing, and as persons transformed by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. It is in this last sense that Christ here speaks. Just as the Father is said to love the Son because of His obedience (Joh 10:17-18), so is He said to love the believer for the same reason. It is the love of complacency,⁹ as distinguished from the love of compassion. The Father was well pleased with His incarnate Son, and He is well pleased with us when we honor and glorify His Son by obeying His commandments...

To “keep” God’s commandments is to obey them, and the primary, the fundamental thing in obedience is the *desire* of the *heart*; and it is on the heart that God ever looks. Two things are true of every Christian: deep down in his heart there is an intense, steady longing and yearning to please God, to do His will, to walk in full accord with His

⁷ Inglis, 137-138.

⁸ **sentiment** – emotional thought conveyed in literature or art.

⁹ **complacency** – satisfaction in something or someone.

Word. This yearning may be stronger in some than in others, and in each of us it is stronger at some times than at others; nevertheless, it is there! But in the second place, no real Christian *fully realizes* this desire. Every genuine Christian has to say with the apostle Paul, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:12).

Now, we believe that it is this heart-obedience, this inward longing to be fully conformed to His will, this burning desire of the renewed soul, of which Christ here speaks. “If a man love me, he *will* keep my word.” Every true believer loves Christ; therefore every true believer “keeps” His Word, keeps it in the sense thus defined. Let it be repeated: God looks at the heart, whereas we are constantly occupied with the *outward* appearance. As we scrutinize our deeds, if we are honest, we have to acknowledge that we have “kept his word” very imperfectly; yea, it seems to us that we are not entitled to say that we have “kept” it at all. But the Lord looks behind the deeds and knows the longings within us.

The case of Peter in John 21 is a pertinent¹⁰ illustration. When Christ asked him a third time, “Lovest thou me?” His disciple answered, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee’ (Joh 21:17). My disgraceful actions contradicted my love; my fellow-disciples have good reason to doubt it, but Thou Who searchest the heart knowest better.” In one sense, it is an intensely solemn and searching thing to remember that *nothing* can be hidden from Him before Whom all things are open and naked; but in another sense, it is most blessed and comforting to realize that *He* can see in my heart what I cannot often discover in my ways, and what my fellow-believers cannot—a real love for Him, a genuine longing to please and glorify Him...Where there is love for Christ, there cannot but be bitter sorrow (as with Peter) when we know that we have grieved Him. And more: there will be a sincere confession of our sins, and confession will be followed by earnest supplication for grace to enable us to do what He has bidden. Nevertheless, it is blessed to know that He Who is the Truth declares, positively and without qualification, “If a man love me, he will keep my word”; and in the light of John 17:6, this must mean first and absolutely, in the desire of his heart; secondly and relatively, in his walk...

“And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and

¹⁰ **pertinent** – relevant to the matter being considered.

make our abode with him”...“Abiding” speaks of *fellowship* all through John’s writings. Not only is our fellowship with the Father and His Son (1Jo 1:3), but to the one who truly heeds the Word, *They* will come and have fellowship with him. This is the reward of loving obedience...

“He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (Joh 14:24). Here was the final word to Judas: the line between “the world” and “his own” is clearly drawn by the “whoso loveth me, whoso loveth me not.” Not to love the Loveliest is because of hatred. There is no other alternative. Of old, Jehovah had declared that He would visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hated Him, but that He would show mercy unto thousands of them that loved Him and kept His commandments (Exo 20:6). What seems to be indifference is really enmity.¹¹ All who are not *with* Christ are *against* Him (Luk 11:23).

“He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings.” Observe the change: in the previous verse the one who loves Christ keeps His *Word*; here the one who loves Him not, [keeps not] His *sayings* or words. Why this variation? Because unbelief does not combine the individual sayings *in their unity*, but dismisses them as they are isolated. The true believer hears in all God’s words one Word—Him, the unbeliever heeds not! An unbeliever may observe some of Christ’s words as a matter of policy and prudence because they commend themselves to his reason; but others, which to him are distasteful, which appear impracticable¹² or severe, he esteems not. If he loved Christ, he would value His Word as a whole, but he does not; therefore he keeps not His words.

From *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923), 785-792, in the public domain.



Holiness is God stamped and printed upon the soul; it is Christ formed in the heart; it is our light, our life, our beauty, our glory, our joy, our crown, our heaven, our all. The holy soul is happy in life, blessed in death, and shall be transcendently glorious in the morning of the resurrection when Christ shall say, “Lo, here am I and my holy ones, who are my joy; Lo, here am I and my holy ones, who are my crown; and therefore, upon the heads of these holy ones will I set an immortal crown.” Even so, Amen! Lord Jesus.—*Thomas Brooks*

¹¹ **enmity** – feelings characteristic of an enemy; hatred.

¹² **impracticable** – not capable of being carried out.

CHRIST'S FRIENDS OBEY HIM

Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.—John 15:14

THE words are a part of Christ's discourse after the supper He had instituted. The chapter begins with a parable, wherein Christ likens Himself to a vine and the disciples (and consequently all believers) to branches. The use of this parable was occasioned, as some think, by Christ's passing by some vineyards, whence He raises a discourse¹ to spiritualize their meditations upon the view of creation. Whether this were so or not, yet the discourse is excellent, both to show the near union and relation of Christ and believers and the way and means of a spiritual growth in sanctification and holiness. Christ was sent into the world to publish a new religion—not a lazy, but a fruitful one. God the Father is the husbandman, Who both dresseth the vine and purgeth the branches to render them fruitful. Several arguments He useth to engage them to abide in Him and consequently to be fruitful:

(1) From their misery without it (15:6). The fire is the portion of unfruitful branches. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire."

(2) From the prevalence² of their prayers with God, if His words did practically and fruitfully abide in them (15:7). "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

(3) From the glory of God and honor of Christ that are furthered by it (15:8). When what you ask is in order to your own fruitfulness and consequently God's glory, you need not fear the grant of your requests. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

(4) From gratitude; since He had given them, and was yet further to give them, the highest demonstration of His affection to them (15:9). "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." You have had evidence of My Father's love to Me, in His witnessing My mis-

¹ **discourse** – conversation.

² **prevalence** – effective power; influence.

sion from heaven by multitudes of miracles, and such a kind of love as My Father bears to Me, I do, and will bear to you if you continue to be My disciples. And all the proof of it I demand of you is the continuance of My commands and the performance of them: "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" (15:10). If you would have such a kind of love from Me as I have had from My Father, you must perform such a kind of obedience to Me as I have performed to My Father. You must make Me a pattern of imitation and My precept the rule of your actions. And "do not think," saith He, that what I have spoken of to you is so much out of an authority or an imperiousness,³ as out of an affection to you and your interest (15:11). It is not that I should have an advantage, but that you should have a joy; that such a joy as you have felt in My presence with you and in My redeeming work may constantly remain in you. Now the way to have this joy is to keep My commandments. Fruitfulness will clear up your interest in Me, and especially the observance of that command of a mutual love to one another, for "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (15:13); and you shall see [that] I will not go backward to discover the highest affection to you; and as I discover⁴ My affection to you in laying down My life, so you can discover your affection to Me only by observing My commands...

What an incentive⁵ have we, then, to an exact obedience! This is the delight of Christ, and so high a delight to Him that He thinks fit to reward it with no less than a special friendship. Christ looked upon the young man's morality with an eye of love (Mar 10:17-24); much more will He [look with love] upon an evangelical obedience. It is not the pomp of the world or the glittering vanities man's heart runs after that can lay any claim to this dignity. Obedience, though low, if sincere, is the delight of Christ. He loves to go into His vineyard and look upon the "tender grapes," as well as upon the "ripe fruit" (Song 7:12; 8:2). It is by this you shew yourselves the friends of Christ; by this you maintain His honor in the world. This is a silent conviction upon others and makes them have some veneration⁶ for religion. Men judge usually of principles by practices, and you never heard any speak against the principles of religion, but they first fell upon the practice of the professors of it. It is by this obedience [that] we glorify

³ **imperiousness** – overbearing, domineering character.

⁴ **discover** – reveal.

⁵ **incentive** – thing that motivates or encourages one to do something.

⁶ **veneration** – feeling of deep or great respect.

God and Christ (Mat 5:16), i.e., make others speak well of the ways of religion. Let this honor of being the friends of Christ engage us to obedience as the means. It is a shame for such that may attain such a privilege to pursue anything lower; an Alexander⁷ watches for kingdoms. It is a poor-spirited Domitian⁸ that loves to catch flies.⁹ How many will conform to men's principles, to their will, for a small reward, yea, for no reward; and shall not we conform to our Redeemer's will for so glorious a title? We must first be Jacobs—supplanters¹⁰ of vice—before we be Israels, seers of God.

Let us close all with a few directions:

(1) Let us walk as those that have the eye of Christ upon us, to see whether we act as friends to Him or no. Let us consider in every action that it is registered by conscience, laid up in Christ's remembrance, and will be censured by Him either as the act of a friend or an enemy. Men look upon the bark of the action: this may appear fair and have a gloss upon it; [but] Christ looks upon the inward part, upon the spirit, to see how the heart is conformed to the command. We may hide our deformities from men, but not from an all-seeing eye. Now I am going to this or that action, I have a watchful eye over me that pierceth into all my thoughts, discovers the principles whereby I am conducted, the end for which I move, and sees how my heart answers the command.

(2) Let us walk as though every action were an inlet to the favor or enmity of Christ. What know I but this action may open a door to the favor of Christ or His endless refusal? What do I know but at the end of this I may either be in Abraham's bosom or in a gulf of misery, and launched into a blessed or miserable eternity?

(3) Let us walk as though the glory of Christ depended upon every action. If our credit, estates, relations, worldly advantages, depended upon one action, how careful and diligent should we be in the doing of it! Let us act as though the honor of Christ and our relation to Him depended upon what we go about.

(4) Let us walk as if we were to give an account immediately of what we have done. Let us set before us Christ's tribunal and imagine ourselves called to judgment. I am going about a business, but if

⁷ **Alexander III of Macedon** (356-323 BC) – commonly known as Alexander the Great; king of Macedon, a state in northern ancient Greece. Before his death at age 32, he had conquered most of the known world.

⁸ **Titus Flavius Domitianus** (51-96) – son of Vespasian; Roman emperor 81-96.

⁹ From *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* by Roman historian C. Suetonius Tranquillus.

¹⁰ **supplanters** – those who take the place of others in treacherous or deceptive ways.

Christ should send for me at the end of it, what account can I give Him of my friendship and obedience to Him in it? Is this such an action that, when I look Christ in the face, I can challenge Him upon this promise to own me as a friend?

(5) Let us walk as though Christ stood before us crucified, with all the obligations of love on His part; as if we saw Him with His wounds open, and love and blood distilling from His heart upon us; and consider whether the act we are going about be suited to such inestimable kindness or a putting Him to an open shame. Hath not Christ had wounds enough, but must I increase them? Hath not He had misery enough, but must I add more? Shall I break His heart Who breathes kindness towards me, and behave myself as an enemy towards Him Who offers me a favor that cannot be merited by a creature? Shall I wound Him Whose heart is open for me and strike Him that woos me? Shall I be a Judas to Him that would be my friend and pull Him down that would lift me up to the highest privilege of a creature?

(6) Let us walk as we think a damned soul would walk, if he were again to live under the knowledge of such a promise. How would he obey, and obey heartily! How would he pray, and pray fervently! How busy might we suppose him to be in inquiring what those commands were and how diligent in the performance of them! How would he by violence take all opportunities to pursue his duty and attain his privilege! What if any should see a damned soul stand before him when he was going into an unclean bed and tell him it was for less than this he was judged an enemy to Christ and a miserable wretch for ever; would any man's fear suffer him to go on in his intended evil? We have not those objects of fear before our eyes, but we have this promise in the Word, suited more to ingenuous¹¹ natures, to be accounted the friends of God and Christ, if we do whatsoever He commands us.

From *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, vol. 4, 587-598, in the public domain.

Stephen Charnock (1628-1680): English Puritan Presbyterian pastor, theologian, and author; born in St. Katherine Cree, London, England, UK.



All obedience must flow from a principle of love. This is taught everywhere in Scripture. Jesus says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Joh 14:15).—*William Plumer*

¹¹ **ingenuous** – honest; free from deception.

CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE SAVES US

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.—Hebrews 5:8-10

WHY did God ordain the office of priesthood? Wherein lay the *necessity* for it? The first and most obvious answer is, Because of sin. Sin created a breach between a holy God and His sinful creatures. Were God to advance toward them in His essential character it could only be in judgment, involving their sure destruction; for He “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:7). Nor was the sinner capable of making the slightest advance toward God, for he was “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18), and thus, “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1); and as such, not only powerless to perform a spiritual act, but completely devoid of all spiritual aspirations. Looked at in himself, the case of fallen man was utterly hopeless.

But God has designs of *grace* unto men, not unto all men, but unto a remnant of them chosen out of a fallen race. Had God shown grace to all of Adam’s descendants, the glory of His grace [would have] been clouded, for it would have looked as though the provisions of grace were something that were due men from God because of His having failed to preserve them from falling into sin. But grace is *unmerited* favor, something to which no creature is entitled, something that he cannot in any wise claim from God. Therefore, it must be exercised in a sovereign manner by the Author of it (Exo 33:19), that grace may appear to be grace (Rom 11:6).

But in determining to show grace unto that people whom He had chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4; 2Ti 1:9), God must act in harmony with His own perfections. The sin of His people could not be ignored. Justice clamored for its punishment. If they were to be delivered from its penal consequences, it could only be by an adequate satisfaction being made for them. Without blood shedding there is no remission of sins. An atonement was a fundamental necessity. Grace could not be shown at the expense of justice; no, grace must “reign through righteousness” (Rom 5:21). Grace

could only be exercised on the ground of accomplished redemption (Rom 3:24).

And *who* was capable of rendering a perfect satisfaction unto the Law of God? Who was qualified to meet all the demands of divine holiness, if a sinful people were to be redeemed consistently with its claims? Who was competent both to assume the responsibilities of that people and discharge them to the full satisfaction of the Most High? Who was able both to honor the rights of the Almighty, and yet to enter sympathetically into the weakness and needs of those who were to be saved? Clearly, the only solution to this problem and the only answer to these questions lay in a *Mediator*,¹ one Who had both ability and title to act on God's behalf and on theirs. For this reason was the Son of God appointed to be made in the likeness of sin's flesh—that as the God-man He might be a “merciful and faithful High Priest” (Heb 2:17); for *mediatorship* is the chief thing in priesthood.

Now this is what is brought before us in the opening verse of Hebrews 5. There we are shown three parties: on the one side God, on the other side men, and the high priest as the connecting link between. “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (5:1). No correct conception of priesthood can exist where this double relation and this double service are not perceived. In Christ alone is this perfectly made good. He is the one connecting link between heaven and earth, the only Mediator between God and “men” (1Ti 2:5). From deity above, He is the Mediator downward to men beneath; and from men below, He is the Head upward to God. Priesthood is the *alone channel* of living relationship with a holy God...

Above we have said that Christ is the one connecting link between heaven and earth, that He alone bridges the chasm between God and His people, considered as fallen and ruined sinners. Our last sentence really sums up the whole of Hebrews 1 and 2. There we have a lengthy argument setting forth the relation between the two natures in Christ—the Divine and the human—and the needs-be of both to fit Him for the priestly office. He must be the Son of God in human na-

¹ **Mediator** – It pleased God in His eternal purpose to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between Them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: unto Whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (Second London Baptist Confession, 8.1) See FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator* and Confession, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

ture. He must “in all things be made like unto his brethren” in order that He might be “a merciful and faithful high priest”; in order that He might make propitiation² for the sins of the people; and in order that He might be “able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18).

The priestly work of Christ was to “make propitiation for the sins of the people.” It was to render a complete satisfaction to God on behalf of all their liabilities. It was to “magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Isa 42:21). In order to do this, it was necessary for the Law to be kept, to be perfectly obeyed in thought, word, and deed. Accordingly, the Son of God was “made under the law” (Gal 4:4) and “fulfilled” its requirements (Mat 5:17). And this perfect obedience of Christ, performed substitutionally³ and officially, is now imputed⁴ to His people: as it is written, “By the obedience of one shall many be (legally) made righteous” (Rom 5:19). But “magnifying the law” also involved His enduring its penalty on the behalf of His people’s violation of its precepts; and this He suffered, and so “redeemed us from the curse of the law” by “being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13)...

Jesus had a divine commission: He was appointed by the Father because He was the Son; and thus He was possessed of all requisite qualifications for His office. Nevertheless, the Son had to “learn obedience.” He must not only possess authority and dignity, but be able to sympathize with the condition of sinners. By entering the circle of human experience, He was made a merciful and faithful High Priest, and through suffering fitted for compassionately guiding our highest interests, as well as conducting our cause...While holding firmly to Christ’s absolute deity, we must not (through a false conception of His dignity) shrink from following Him in thought and affection into that abyss of humiliation unto which, for our sakes, He came. When Scripture says, “He learned obedience,” we must not whittle down these words to mean anything less than they affirm...But what is “obedience?” It is subjection to the will of another, an owning of the authority of another, performing the pleasure of another. This was an entirely new experience for the Son.

Before His incarnation, He had Himself occupied the place of authority—supreme authority. His seat had been the throne of the universe. From it, He had issued commands and had enforced obedience. But now, He had taken the place of a servant. He had assumed a

² **propitiation** – sin offering that turns away wrath; an appeasement.

³ See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁴ See FGB 191, *Imputed Righteousness*.

creature nature. He had become man. And in this new place and role, He conducted Himself with befitting submission to Another. He had been “made under the law,” and its precepts must be honored by Him. But more: the place He had taken was an official one. He had come here as the Surety⁵ of His people. He had come to discharge their liabilities. He had come to work out a perfect righteousness for them; and therefore, as their Representative, He must obey God’s Law. As the One Who was here to maintain the claims of God, He must “magnify the law and make it honorable,” by yielding to it a voluntary, perfect, joyous compliance.

Again, the “obedience” of Christ formed an essential part of His priestly [sacrifice]...When Christ “offered Himself without spot to God” (Heb 9:14), He presented a sacrifice that had already fulfilled every preceptive⁶ requirement of the Law...The incarnate Son actually entered into the experience of what it was to obey. He denied Himself, He renounced His own will, He “pleased not himself” (Rom 15:3). There was no insubordination in Him, nothing disinclined to God’s Law; instead, His obedience was voluntary and hearty. But by being “made under the law” as Man, He “learned” what divine righteousness required of Him; by receiving commandment to lay down His life (Joh 10:18), He “learned” the extent of that obedience that holiness demanded...As we learn the sweetness or bitterness of food by actually tasting it, so He learned what submission is by yielding to the Father’s will...

“By the things which He suffered” announces the *means* by which He learned obedience. Everything that Christ suffered, from first to last during the days of His flesh, is here included. His entire course was one of suffering, and He had the experience of obedience in it all. Every scene through which He passed provided occasion for the exercise of those graces wherein obedience consists. Meekness and lowliness (Mat 11:29), self-denial (Rom 15:3), patience (Rev 1:9), faith (Heb 2:13), were habitually resident in His holy nature, but they were only capable of exercise by reason of His suffering. As His suffering increased, so His obedience grew in extent and intensity, by the very pressure brought to bear upon it; the hotter the conflict grew, the more His inward submission was manifested outwardly (*cf.* Isa 50:6-7). There were not only sufferings passively endured, but obedience in suffering—and that the most amazing and unparalleled.

⁵ **Surety** – one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another; as our Surety, Christ guaranteed a full legal satisfaction for our sin by His death upon Calvary’s cross.

⁶ **preceptive** – pertaining to or conveying a command.

To sum up now the important teachings of this wonderful verse: He Who personally was high above all obedience stooped so low as to enter the place of obedience. In that place He learned, by His sufferings, the actual experience of obedience—He obeyed. Hereby we learn what was required to the right discharge of Surety-ship: there must needs be both an active and a passive obedience vicariously⁷ rendered. The opening word *though* intimates that the high dignity of His person did not exempt Him from the humiliation that our salvation involved. The word *yet* is a note of exclamation, to deepen our sense of wonderment at His infinite condescension on our behalf, for in His place of servitude He never ceased to be the Lord of glory...

And what are the practical lessons here pointed for us? First, our Redeemer has left us an example that we should follow His steps. He has shown us how to wear our creature nature: complete and unquestioning subjection to God is that which is required of us. Second, Christ has hereby taught us the extent to which God ought to be submitted unto: He was “obedient unto death.”

“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (5:9)...“To all them that obey him” describes those who are the beneficiaries⁸ of our High Priest’s atonement...It is not all men universally, but those only who bow to His scepter. The recipients of His great salvation are here spoken of according to the terms of human accountability. All who hear the gospel are commanded to believe (1Jo 3:23); such is their responsibility. The “obedience” of this verse is an evangelical, not a legal one: it is the “obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26). So also in Acts 5:32, we read of the Holy Spirit “whom God hath given to them that obey him.” But this “obedience” is not to be restricted to the initial act, but takes in the whole life of faith. A Christian, in contradistinction⁹ from a non-Christian, is one who *obeys* Christ (Joh 14:23). The “all them that obey him” of Hebrews 5:9 is in opposition to “yet learned he obedience” in the previous verse: it identifies the members with their Head!

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



Faith is the mother of obedience.—*Charles Spurgeon*

⁷ **vicariously** – by means of suffering in the place of another.

⁸ **beneficiaries** – those who receive benefits or favors.

⁹ **contradistinction** – distinction made by contrasting the different qualities of two things.