

The School of Obedience

by Andrew Murray

1898

Fleming H. Revell Company New York

~ out of print and in the public domain ~

6. THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

'By faith Abraham... obeyed.' -Hebrews 11:8.

'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive as an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.' He believed that there was a land of Canaan, of which GOD had spoken. He believed in it as the *'land of promise,'* secured to him as an inheritance. He believed that GOD would bring him there, would show it him, and give it him. In that faith he dared go out, not knowing whither he went. In the blessed ignorance of faith he trusted GOD, and obeyed, and received the inheritance.

The land of promise that has been set before us is the blessed life of obedience. We have heard GOD's call to go out and dwell there - about that there can be no mistake. We have heard the promise of CHRIST to bring us there, and to give us possession of the land - that, too, is clear and sure.

We have surrendered ourselves to our Lord, and asked of our Father to make all this true in us. Our desire now is that all our life and work in it may be lifted up to the level of a holy and joyful obedience: and that through us GOD may make obedience the key-note of the Christian life we aim at promoting in others. Our aim is high: we can only reach it by a new inflow of the power that comes from above. It is only by a faith that gets a new vision and hold of the powers of the heavenly world, secured to us in CHRIST, that we can obey and obtain the promise.

As we think of all this, of cultivating in ourselves and others the conviction that we only live to please Him to serve His purposes, some are ready to say:

'This is not a land of promise we are called to enter, but a life of burden and difficulty and certain failure.'

Do not say so, my brother! GOD calls you indeed to a land of promise. Come and prove what He can work in you. Come and experience what the nobility is of a Christlike obedience unto death. Come and see what blessing GOD will give to him who, with CHRIST, gives himself the uttermost unto the ever-blessed and most holy will of GOD. Only believe in the glory of this good land of whole-hearted obedience; in GOD, in who calls you to it; in CHRIST, who will bring you in; in the HOLY SPIRIT, who dwells and works all there. He that believeth entereth in.

I wish, then, to speak of the obedience of faith, and of faith as the sufficient power for all obedience. I give you these five simple words as expressive of the disposition of a believing heart entering on that life in the good land:- I see it, I desire it, I expect it, I accept it, I trust CHRIST for it.

I. FAITH SEES IT

We have been trying to show you the map of the land, and to indicate the most important places in that land - the points at which GOD meets and blesses the soul. What we need now is in faith quietly and definitely to settle the question:

Is there really such a land of promise, in which continuous obedience is certainly, is divinely possible? As long as there is any doubt on this point, it is out of the question to go up and possess the land.

Just think of Abraham's faith. It rested in GOD, in His omnipotence and His faithfulness. We have put before you the promises of GOD. Hear another of them: *'A new heart also will I give you... and I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them.'* Here is GOD's covenant engagement. He adds, *'I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.'* He undertakes to cause and enable you to obey. In CHRIST and the HOLY SPIRIT He has made the most wonderful provision for fulfilling His engagement.

Just do what Abraham did - fix your heart upon GOD. '[He] was strong in faith, giving glory to GOD, and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform.' GOD's omnipotence was Abraham's stay. Let it be yours. Look out on all the promises GOD's Word gives of a clean heart, a heart established blameless in holiness, of a life in righteousness and holiness, of a walk in all the commandments of the Lord unblameable and well-pleasing to Him, of GOD's working in us to will and to do, of His working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, in the simple faith: GOD says this; His power can do it.

Let the assurance that a life of full obedience is possible, possess you. Faith can see the invisible and the impossible. Gaze on the vision until your heart says:

'It must be true. It is true. There is a life promised I have never yet known.'

II. FAITH DESIRES IT

When I read the gospel story and see how ready the sick and the blind and the needy were to believe CHRIST's word, I often ask myself what it was that made them so much more ready to believe than we are. The answer I get in the Word is this, that one great difference lies in the honesty and intensity of the desire. They did indeed desire deliverance with their whole heart. There was no need of pleading with them to make them willing to take His blessing.

Alas, that it should be so different with us! All indeed wish, in a sort of way, to be better than they are. But how few there are who really 'hunger and thirst after righteousness'; how few who intensely long and cry after a life of close obedience, and the continual consciousness of being pleasing to GOD.

There can be no strong faith without strong desire. Desire is the great motive-power in the universe. It was GOD's desire to save us that moved HIM to send His Son. It is desire that moves one to study and work and suffer. It is alone the desire for salvation that brings a sinner to CHRIST. It is the desire for GOD, and the closest possible fellowship with Him, the desire to be just what He would have us be, and to have as much of His will as possible, that will make the promised land attractive to us. It is this will make us forsake everything to get our full share in the obedience of CHRIST.

And how can the desire be awakened?

Shame on us, that we need to ask the question; that the most desirable of all things, likeness to GOD in the union with His will and doing it, has so little attraction for us!

Let us take it as a sign of our blindness and dullness, and beseech GOD to give us by His Spirit *'eyes of... understanding being enlightened,'* that we may see and know *'the riches of the glory of His inheritance'* waiting upon the life of true obedience. Let us turn and gaze, in this light of GOD's Spirit, and gaze again on the life as possible, as certain, as divinely secured and divinely blessed, until our faith begins to burn with desire, and to say:

'I do long to have it. With my whole heart will I seek it.'

III. FAITH EXPECTS IT

The difference between desire and expectation is great. There is often a strong desire after salvation in a soul who has little hope of really obtaining it.

It is a great step in advance when desire passes into expectation, and the soul begins to savor spiritual blessing:

'I am sure it is for me, and, though I do not see how, I confidently expect to obtain it.'

The life of obedience is no longer an unattainable ideal held out by GOD, to make us strive at least to get a little nearer it, but is become a reality, meant for the life in flesh and blood here on earth. Expect it, as most certainly meant for you. Expect GOD to make it true.

There is much indeed to hinder this expectation. Your past failure; your unfavorable temperament or circumstances; your feeble faith; your difficulty as to what such a devotion, obedient unto death, may demand; your conscious lack of power for it; -all this makes you say:

'It may be for others; it is not for me, I fear.'

I beseech you, speak not thus. You are leaving GOD out of account. Expect to get it. Look up to His power and His love, and do begin to say,

'It is for me.'

Take courage from the lives of GOD's saints who have gone before you. Santa Teresa writes that after her conversion she spent more than eighteen years of her life in that miserable attempt to reconcile GOD and her life of sin. But at last she was able to write,

'I have made a vow never to offend God in the very least matter. I have vowed that I would rather die a thousand deaths than do anything of that kind, knowing I was doing it - this was obedience unto death. I am resolved never to leave anything whatever undone that I consider still to be more perfect, and more for the honor of my Lord.'

(She says further: *'We are so long and so slow in giving up our hearts to Thee. And then Thou wilt not permit our possession of Thee without our paying well for so precious a possession. There is nothing in all the world wherewith to buy the shedding abroad of Thy love in our hearts, but our heart's love. God never withholds Himself from them who pay this price and persevere in seeking Him. He will, little by little, and now and then, strengthen and restore that soul, until it is at last victorious.'*)

Gerhard Tersteegen had from his youth sought and served the Lord. After a time the sense of GOD's grace was withdrawn from him, and for five long years he was as one far away on the great sea, where neither sun nor stars appear. *'But my hope was in Jesus.'* All at once a light broke on him that never went out, and he wrote, with blood drawn from his veins, that letter to the Lord JESUS in which he said:

'From this evening to all eternity, Thy will, not mine be done. Command and rule and reign in me. I yield up myself without reserve, and I promise, with Thy help and power, rather to give up the last drop of my blood than knowingly or willingly be untrue or disobedient to Thee.'

That was his obedience unto death.

Set your heart upon it, and expect it. The same GOD lives still. Set your hope on Him; He will do it.

IV. FAITH ACCEPTS IT

To accept is more than to expect. Many wait and hope and never possess because they do not accept.

To all who have not accepted, and feel as if they were not ready to accept, we say, Expect. If the expectation be from the heart, and be set indeed upon GOD Himself, it will lead the soul to accept.

To all who say they do expect, we urgently say, Accept. Faith has the wondrous God-given power of saying,

'I accept, I take, I have.'

It is for the lack of this definite faith, that claims and appropriates the spiritual blessing we desire, that so many prayers appear to be fruitless. For such an act of faith all are not ready. Where there is no true conviction of the sin of disobedience, and alas! no true sorrow for it;

where there is no strong longing or purpose really in everything to obey GOD; where there is no deep interest in the message of Holy Scripture, that GOD wants to perfect us *'to do His will,'* by Himself working in us *'that which is wellpleasing in His sight,'* there is not the spiritual capacity to accept the blessing. The Christian is content to be a babe. He wants only to suck the milk of consolation. He is not able to bear the strong meat of which JESUS ate, *doing the will of His Father.*

And yet we come to all with the entreaty, Accept it, the grace for this wondrous new life of obedience; accept it now. Without this your act of consecration will come to little. Without this your purpose to try and be more obedient must fail. Has not GOD shown you that there is an entirely new position for you to take - a possible position of simple childlike obedience, day by day, to every command His voice speaks to you through the Spirit: a possible position of simple childlike dependence on and experience of His all-sufficient grace, day by day, for every command He gives?

I pray you, even now, take that position, make that surrender, take that grace. Accept and enter on the true life of faith, and the unceasing obedience of faith. As unlimited and as sure as GOD's promise and power are, may your faith be. As unlimited as your faith is, will your simple childlike obedience be. Oh! ask GOD for His aid, and accept all He has offered you.

V. FAITH TRUSTS CHRIST FOR ALL

'All the promises of God in Him (CHRIST JESUS), are yea, and in Him, Amen, unto the glory of God by us.' It is possible that as we have spoken of the life of obedience, there have been questions and difficulties rising to which you cannot at once give answer.

You may feel as if you cannot take it all in at once, or reconcile it with all the old habits of thought and speech and action. You fear you will not be able at once to bring all into subjection to this supreme all-controlling principle,

'Do everything as the will of God: do all as obedience to Him.'

To all these questions there is one answer; one deliverance from all these fears; JESUS CHRIST, the living Saviour, knows all, and asks you to trust yourself to Him for the wisdom and the power to walk ever in the obedience of faith.

We have seen more than once how His whole redemption, as He effected it, is nothing but obedience. As He communicates it, it is still the same. He gives us the spirit of obedience as the spirit of our life. This spirit comes to us each moment through Him. He Himself keeps charge of our obedience. There is none under Heaven but what He has and gives and works. He offers Himself to us as surety for its maintenance, and asks us to trust Him for it. It is in JESUS Himself all our fears are removed, all our needs supplied, all our desires met. As He the righteous One is your righteousness, He the obedient One is your obedience.

Will you not trust Him for it? What faith sees and desires and expects and accepts, surely it dares trust CHRIST to give and to work.

Will you not to-day take the opportunity of giving glory to GOD and His Son, by trusting JESUS now to lead you into the promised land: Look up to your glorified Lord in Heaven, and in His strength renew, with new meaning, your vow of allegiance, your vow never to do anything knowingly or willingly that would offend Him.

Trust Him for the faith to make the vow, for the heart to keep it, for the strength to carry it out. Trust Him, the loving One, by His living presence, to secure both your faith and obedience. Trust Him, and venture to join in an act of consecration, in the assurance that He undertakes to be its Yea and Amen, to the glory of GOD by us.

~ end of chapter 6 ~
