

**CHAPTER XIII.**

**NEW COVENANT OBEDIENCE**

*“Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a holy nation unto Me.” Ex. 19. 5.*

*“And the Lord Thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul. And thou shalt obey the voice of the Lord, and do all His commandments.” DEUT. 30. 6, 8.*

*“And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments.” EZEK. 36. 27.*

**I**N making the New Covenant, God said very definitely, “Not after the covenant I made with your fathers.” We have learnt what the fault was with that Covenant: it made God’s favour dependent upon the obedience of the people. “If ye obey, I will be your God.” We have learnt how the New Covenant remedied the defect: God Himself provided for the obedience. It changes “If ye keep My judgments” into “I will put My Spirit within you, and ye shall keep.” Instead of the Covenant and its fulfilment depending on man’s obedience, God undertakes to ensure the obedience. The Old Covenant proved the need, and pointed out the

path of holiness: the New inspires the love and gives the power, of holiness.

In connection with this change, a serious and most dangerous mistake is often made. Because in the New Covenant obedience no longer occupies the place it had in the Old, as the condition of the Covenant, and free grace has taken its place, justifying the ungodly, and bestowing gifts on the rebellious, many are under the impression that obedience is now no longer as indispensable as it was then. The error is a terrible one. The whole Old Covenant was meant to teach the lesson of the absolute and indispensable necessity of obedience for a life in God's favour. The New Covenant comes, not to provide a substitute for that obedience in faith, but through faith to secure the obedience, by giving a heart that delights in it and has the power for it. And men abuse the free grace, that without our own obedience accepts us for a life of new obedience, when they rest content with the grace, without the obedience it is meant for. They boast of the higher privileges of the New Covenant, while its chief blessing, the power of a holy life, a heart delighting in God's law, and a life in which God causes and enables us, by his indwelling Spirit, to keep His commandments, is neglected. If there is one thing we need to know well, it is the place obedience takes in the New Covenant.

Let our first thought be: Obedience is essential. At the very root of the relation of a creature to his God, and of God admitting the creature to His fellowship, lies the thought of obedience. It is the one only thing God spoke of in Paradise when "the Lord God commanded the man " not to eat of the forbidden fruit. In Christ's great salvation it is the power that redeemed us: "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." In the promise of the New

Covenant it takes the first place. God engages to circumcise the hearts of His people—in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ—to love God with all their heart, and to obey His commandments. The crowning gift of Christ's exaltation was the Holy Ghost, to bring salvation to us as an inward thing. The first Covenant demanded obedience, and failed because it could not find it. The New Covenant was expressly made to provide for obedience. To a life in the full experience of the New Covenant blessing, obedience is essential.

It is this indispensable necessity of obedience that explains why so often the entrance into the full enjoyment of the New Covenant has depended upon some single act of surrender. There was something in the life, some evil or doubtful habit, in regard to which conscience had often said that it was not in perfect accord with God's perfect will. Attempts were made to push aside the troublesome suggestion. Or unbelief said it would be impossible to overcome the habit, and maintain the promise of obedience to the Voice within. Meantime, all our prayer appeared of no avail. It was as if faith could not lay hold of the blessing which was full in sight, until at last the soul consented to regard this little thing as the test of its surrender to obey in everything, and of its faith that in everything the Surety of the Covenant would give power to maintain the obedience. With the evil or doubtful thing given up, with a good conscience restored, and the heart's confidence before God assured, the soul could receive and possess what it sought. Obedience is essential.

Obedience is possible. The thought of a demand which man cannot possibly render, cuts at the very root of true hope and strength. The secret thought, "No man can obey God," throws thousands back into the Old Covenant life, and into a false peace that God does

not expect more than that we do our best. Obedience is possible: the whole New Covenant promises and secures this.

Only understand aright what obedience means. The renewed man has still the flesh, with its evil nature, out of which there arise involuntary evil thoughts and dispositions. These may be found in a truly obedient man. Obedience deals with the doing of what is known to be God's will, as taught by the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and conscience. When George Muller spoke of the great happiness he had for more than sixty years in God's service, he attributed it two things—He had loved God's Word, and "he had maintained a good conscience, not wilfully going on in a course he knew to be contrary to the mind of God." When the full light of God broke in upon Gerhard Tersteegen, he wrote: "I promise, with Thy help and power, rather to give up the last drop of my blood, than knowingly and willingly in my heart or my life be untrue and disobedient to Thee." Such obedience is an attainable degree of grace.

Obedience is possible. When the law is written in the heart; when the heart is circumcised to love the Lord with all our heart, and to obey Him; when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart; it means that the love of God's law and of Himself has now become the moving power of our life. This love is no vague sentiment, in man's imagination of something that exists in heaven, but a living, mighty power of God in the heart, working effectually according to His working, which worketh in us mightily. A life of obedience is possible.

This obedience is of faith. "By faith, Abraham obeyed." By faith the promises of the Covenant, the presence of the Surety of the Covenant, the hidden inworking of the Holy Spirit, and the love

of God in His infinite desire and power to make true in us all His love and promises, must live in us. Faith can bring them nigh, and make us live in the very midst of them. Christ and His wonderful redemption need not remain at a distance from us in heaven, but can become our continual experience. However cold or feeble we may feel, faith knows that the new heart is in us, that the love of God's law is our very nature, that the teaching and power of the Spirit are within us. Such faith knows it can obey. Let us hear the voice of our Saviour, the Surety of the Covenant, as He says, with a deeper, fuller meaning than when He was on earth: "Only believe. If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

And last of all, let us understand: Obedience is blessedness. Do not regard it only as the way to the joy and blessings of the New Covenant, but as itself, in its very nature, joy and happiness. To have the voice of God teaching and guiding you, to be united to God in willing what He wills, in working out what He works in you by His Spirit, in doing His Holy Will, and pleasing Him,—surely all this is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

To a healthy man, it is a delight to walk or work, to put forth his strength and conquer difficulties. To a slave or a hireling it is bondage and weariness. The Old Covenant demanded obedience with an inexorable must, and the threat that followed it. The New Covenant changes the must to can and may. Do ask God, by the Holy Spirit, to show you how "you have been created in Christ Jesus unto good works," and how, as fitted as a vine is for bearing grapes, your new nature is perfectly prepared for every good work. Ask Him to show you that He means obedience, not only to be a possible thing, but the most delightful and attractive gift He has to bestow, the entrance into His love and all its blessedness.

In the New Covenant the chief thing is not the wonderful treasure of strength and grace it contains, nor the Divine security that that treasure never can fail, but this, that the living God gives Himself, and makes Himself known, and takes possession of us as our God. For this man was created, for this He was redeemed again, for this, that it maybe our actual experience, the Holy Spirit has been given and is dwelling in us. Between what God has already wrought in us, and what He waits to work, obedience is the blessed link. Let us seek to walk before Him in the confidence that we are of those who live in the noble and holy consciousness: my one work is to obey God. (In a volume just published, *The School of Obedience*, the thoughts of this chapter are more fully worked out.)

What can be the reason, I ask once again, that so many believers have seen so little of the beauty of this New Covenant life, with its power of holy and joyful obedience? “Their eyes were holden that they knew Him not.” The Lord was with the disciples, but their hearts were blind. It is so still. It is as with Elisha’s servant, all heaven is around him and he knows it not. Nothing will help but the prayer, “Lord, open his eyes, that he may see.” Lord, is there not someone who may be reading this, who just needs one touch to see it all? Oh! give that touch!

Just listen, my brother. Thy Father loves thee with an infinite love, and longs to make thee, even to-day, His holy, happy, obedient child. Hear His message: He has for thee an entirely different life from what thou art living. A life in which His grace shall actually work in thee every moment all He asks thee to be. A life of simple childlike obedience, doing for the day just what the Father shows thee to be His will. A life in which the abiding love of thy Father, and the abiding presence of thy Saviour, and the joy of the Holy Spirit, can keep thee, and make thee glad and strong.

This is His message. This life is for thee. Fear not to accept this life, to give up thyself to it and its entire obedience. In Christ it is possible, it is sure.

Now, my brother, just turn heavenward and ask the Father, by the Holy Spirit, to show thee the beautiful heavenly life. Ask and expect it. Keep thine eyes fixed upon it. The great blessing of the New Covenant is obedience; the wonderful power to will and do as God wills. It is indeed the entrance to every other blessing. It is paradise restored and heaven opened—the creature honouring his Creator, the Creator delighting in His creature; the child glorifying the Father, the Father glorifying the child, as He changes him, from glory to glory, into the likeness of His Son.