

sumptuously take upon them to judge men's state, hearts, and consciences, upon slips of human infirmity and weakness.

3. Let none be ashamed to own Christ and his truths and ways before the world, remembering that the day cometh in which he will confess those that confess him, and deny those that deny him.

4. Though the day of judgment be an awful thought, it will be a happy day to believers, as they will then be for ever delivered from all moral and penal evils, and admitted into the greatest felicity in the enjoyment of their God and Redeemer for ever.

5. That there is no true happiness till we come to the enjoyment of God, nor full happiness till we arrive at the full enjoyment of him.

6. *Lastly*, Miserable is now, and at the resurrection will be, the state of the wicked, where the reverse of all the happiness of the saints will be found, and that in the most dreadful manner. Let us then all seek to be found among those who shall be partakers of the better and glorious resurrection.



OF THE DUTY WHICH GOD REQUIRETH OF MAN.

1 SAM. XV. 22.—*And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?*

THIS text is a reproof given to one that wore a crown, teaching him, that though he was Israel's sovereign, he was God's subject. Saul had been sent, by God's express command, on an expedition against the Amalekites, with a solemn charge utterly to 'destroy all that they had, and spare them not; but to slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass,' ver. 3. The expedition was crowned with success. Saul having destroyed all the people, took Agag their king prisoner, and saved the best of the cattle; and when quarrelled by Samuel for this his partial obedience to the heavenly mandate, he pretended that the people had spared the sheep and oxen, which had been devoted to destruction as well as the people, to sacrifice unto the Lord in Gilgal. The words of the text contain Samuel's answer to this silly apology: *Hath the Lord* (says he) *as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?* importing, that obedience to the voice and will of God is more acceptable to him than all the sacrifices in the world.

In the words we may notice,

1. The duty which God requires of men, which is *obedience*. This is required of man, of all men, rulers and ruled : those whom others must obey, must obey God.

2. What they are to obey, *the voice of the Lord*, whereby he manifests his will : it is his revealed will, whatever way he is pleased to notify it to them. Hence the obedience in the text is called *hearken- ing* ; the soul first receiving the knowledge of God's mind, and then complying with it.

3. The excellency and eminency of this duty.

(1.) God delights in it.

(2.) All other things must yield to it, but it to none. Burnt-offerings and sacrifices, even the fat of them, are nothing in comparison of this.

The text affords the following doctrine, viz.

Doct. 'The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.'

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

I. Explain it ; and,

II. Deduce a few inferences for application.

I. For explanation, let us consider the duty which man owes to God, of whom he requires it, the rule of it, the properties of it, and on what accounts we owe it.

First, Let us consider the duty which man owes unto God. That is obedience. We are in a state of subjection to God. He is our superior, and his will we are to obey in all things. He is our King, and we must obey him as his subjects, by complying with all his statutes and ordinances. He is our Father, and we must shew him all respect, reverence, and affection, as his dutiful children. He is our Lord and Master, and we must yield him the most cheerful and unlimited service, as is our reasonable duty. He is our supreme Law-giver, and we must receive the law at his mouth, every law and precept, every ordinance that is stamped with his authority, whatever is subscribed with a 'Thus saith the Lord,' readily obeying it.

Secondly, Let us consider of whom the Lord requires this duty. Of every man without exception, capable of knowing his will. The greatest are fast bound to his obedience as the meanest, the poor as well as the rich, Pagans as well as Christians, kings as well as subjects. No man can be free from this duty more than he can be a God to himself. Not a son or daughter sprung from Adam can plead an exemption from this duty of obeying the will of the Lord. It is an easy yoke wreathed upon the necks of all, and is imposed on them by an indispensable law.

Thirdly, Let us consider the rule of that obedience. It is the will

of God. His will is our supreme law. Not the secret will of God; for that which God never revealed to man, cannot be his rule; but the revealed will of God, Deut. xxix. 29. 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children.' Men may fulfil the secret will of God, and determination of his providence, and be deeply guilty, as we see the Jews did in crucifying the Lord of glory, Acts ii. 23. under the guilt of which heinous sin that people groan to this day. But conformity to God's revealed will is our duty. Whatever is revealed in the sacred scriptures as the will of God, whether relating to what man is to believe, or what he is to practise, is to be performed and done, and that at our peril.

Fourthly, Let us consider the properties of this obedience which God requires of man.

1. It is sincere obedience to his will. Hence David says, 'I was upright before him,' Psal. xviii. 23. Hypocritical obedience may please men, but not God, the searcher of hearts. It was the commendation of the obedience of the Romans, that they 'obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered them,' Rom. vi. 17. That sacrifice that wants the heart, will never be accepted on God's altar. God weighs not the affections of his people to him by their actions, so much as their actions by their affections, as in the case of Abraham's offering up Isaac, Heb. xi. 17.; in that of the Israelites offering to go into the promised land, Num. xiv. 40. compared with ver. 42, 44. which was an act of downright disobedience to the commandment of the Lord, notified to them by Moses. All obedience without uprightness or sincerity, is a mere counterfeit, an empty pretence, which will be rejected with abhorrence.

2. It must be constant obedience. We must 'keep God's law continually, for ever and ever,' as the Psalmist resolved to do, Psal. cxix. 44. Man is ever doing something, yet he must always abide within the hedge of the law. Our obedience to God is all wrong when it comes only by fits, as heat in an ague, or is broke off like those that go to sea for pleasure, who come ashore when the storm rises. God is unchangeable, and we must be constant and steady in obeying his will; at no time daring to act contrary to it.

3. It must be tender obedience. We must 'abstain from all appearance of evil,' 1 Thess. v. 22. We must 'hate even the garment spotted with the flesh,' Jude 23. We must not rub on this hedge, nor come too near the borders of wickedness. We have to do with a jealous God, whom whorish looks will offend, Ezek. vi. 9. We cannot be too nice in obedience. We must not, in order to practice, examine whether it be a great or a little sin. All such

distinctions are highly criminal, and inconsistent with the disposition of the person of a tender heart, who hates every sin of every kind, whether great or small, the wicked act as well as the wicked thought. A tender, a relenting heart, a heart afraid of sin, and cautious of the least wrong thought or act, is that which God requires, and the obedience resulting from it is the tender obedience here required.

4. It must be ready obedience, like that of those of whom the Psalmist speaks, 'As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me,' Psal. xviii. 24. We must do, and not delay; but be like the good David, who said, 'I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments,' Psal. cxix. 60. We are not to dispute, but obey; 'not to confer with flesh and blood,' Gal. i. 16. It was Jonah's sin that he did not readily comply; and it was Abraham's commendation, that he did not dispute God's orders, but 'went not knowing whither he went,' Heb. xi. 8. The least intimation of God's will, either as to doing or suffering, must be immediately and readily complied with, notwithstanding all discouragements and carnal reasonings. God's call and command must drown the voice of carnal ease, and all arguments arising from *Spare thyself*. Does God say? we must immediately go whither he directs us: does he say, Come? we must instantly obey the summons, saying, Lord, we are here, ready to do what thou pleasest to order or enjoin us. Without this readiness and alacrity, all our obedience is stark naught, a matter of mere force and compulsion; and therefore unacceptable to the great God, whom we are bound to serve with a perfect heart and a willing mind.

5. It must be universal obedience, Psal. cxix. 6. in 'having a respect unto all God's commandments.' The whole of the commands of God have the same divine stamp upon them. They are one golden chain: whose takes away one link, breaks the chain; if the connection be destroyed, the whole machine falls asunder. Hear what the apostle James says on this head, chap. ii. 10, 11. 'Whosoever shall keep the law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.' Obedience to one command will never sanctify disobedience to another. The contempt shewn to one is a contempt of the one Lawgiver who appointed the whole. Hear what Christ, the glorious Legislator of the church, hath said on this article, 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.' Thus the transgressing of one of the least of God's commandments, if any of them can justly be called such, is a breach

of the others, however great and important, and that because the authority of God, that gives sanction to the whole, is slighted and contemned. Whoso makes no conscience of any one known duty, discovers hypocrisy in the rest.

6. It must be absolute obedience, like that of Abraham, who, when called to go out into a place which he was not acquainted with, went accordingly, 'not knowing whether he went,' Heb. xi. 8. Subjects are obedient to magistrates, people to pastors, wives to husbands, children to parents; but absolute obedience is due to none but God: for we are to call no man father upon earth, Matt. xxiii. 9. If their commands be contradicted by God's, they are not to be obeyed; but though God's commands be contradicted by all the world, we must obey them, as the disciples refused to obey the commands of the Jewish council, in not preaching in the name of Jesus, because they clashed with the orders of their exalted Master, Acts iv. 19. The most unreserved and unlimited obedience is due to the will and command of the great Lord of heaven and earth, and that without exception or reserve, say to the contrary who will.

7. *Lastly*, It must be perfect; though now in our fallen state we cannot give any obedience that deserves that epithet. God may and does require of all men in whatsoever state, Matt. v. ult. 'Be perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' Though he accepts sincere obedience from those that are in Christ, yet he requires of them perfect obedience, and every imperfection is their sin. Though he has not suspended their justification on their perfection, yet it is what they naturally owe to God, whose law is perfect, and must have a perfect obedience performed to it, either by man himself or his surety. The believer, sensible of his utter incapacity to perform such an obedience to the holy law of God, renounces all his own sinful and imperfect, though sincere obedience, and betakes himself to the complete obedience of his Surety, and presents it as his own to God, which he accepts.

In short, all true and acceptable obedience to the will of God flows from a right principle, that of faith and love in the heart. Faith is the hand that unites the soul to Christ, and obedience to God is the fruit of that union. Love is the spring and source of it; for he that loveth Christ, keepeth his commandments. And it must be directed to a right end, namely, the glory of God. We are not to obey God, in order to stop the mouth of a natural conscience, or gain applause among men, but to grow more like God, and bring more honour and glory to him.

Fifthly, Let us consider on what accounts do we owe this obedience to God. On these principally, viz.

1. Because he is our great and glorious Creator, to whom we owe our life and being. He is our Lord, and we are his subjects; he is our Master, and we are his servants. And therefore it is just and right that we should obey him, and conform to his will. He is every thing that speaks an authority to command us, and that can challenge an humility in us to obey. Man holds all of God, and therefore owes all the operations capable to be produced by those faculties, to the sovereign power that endued him with them. Man had no being but from him, and he hath no motion without him; he should therefore have no being but for him, and no motion but according to his will. To call him Lord, and not to act in subjection to him, is to mock and put an affront upon him. Hence it is said, 'Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?' Luke vi. 46.

2. Because he is our chief end, the chief and last end of all being. The Lord hath made all things for himself; and of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. His glory should be the ultimate end of all our actions, and the mark to which they should all be directed. He gave being to all things, that they might shew forth his praise. All the brute creatures, things animate and inanimate, do this in a passive manner; but men and angels, who are rational agents, are bound to do this actively; and they are designed by God for this very end and purpose.

3. Because he is the conserving cause of all. As he gave man a being, so he upholds and preserves him therein, by his mighty power. The preservation of the creatures is as it were a continued creation; and in order to it there is necessary a continual exertion of divine power, and a constant efflux of providential influence, without which they could not move and act at all. As therefore the life and motions of men depend entirely upon God as their upholder, so that life and those motions should be employed for promoting his glory, and promoting his will.

4. Because of the eminency of his nature, which founds his supreme dominion over us. God is the most glorious and excellent of all beings, and the source and spring of all other beings whatsoever. He is possessed of all perfections in an infinite and transcendent manner. Whatever perfections, excellencies, and amiable qualities, are scattered among the creatures, they all unite in him in the utmost perfection, and in him they shine with the most resplendent glory.—And therefore he has a just title to the homage and obedience of all his creatures.

5. Because he is our good and gracious Benefactor, from whose bountiful hand all our mercies do flow. It is in him that we live, move, and have our being. Our health, strength, time, and all bless-

sings, spiritual or temporal, that we enjoy, are the fruits of his goodness and providential care. Now, this lays strong obligations upon us to serve and obey him. We find the Lord aggravating the rebellion of the Jews from the care he had taken in bringing them up, and their miraculous deliverance from Egypt, Isa. i. 2. 'I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me,' which clearly implies, that the benefits he had bestowed upon them were strong obligations to an ingenuous observance of him; and we find him threatening to deprive them of the blessings he had bestowed upon them, and to bring great distress upon them for the neglect of this duty, Deut. xxviii. 47, &c.

6. *Lastly*, Because he is our Governor and supreme Lawgiver. He is a Lawgiver to all, to irrational as well as rational creatures. The heavens have their ordinances, Job xxxviii. 33. All the creatures have a law imprinted on their beings, but rational creatures have divine statutes inscribed on their hearts, as Rom. ii. 14, 15. 'When the Gentiles, which have not the [written] law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts.' And they have laws more clearly and fully set before them in the word. The sole power of making laws does originally reside in God, Jam. iv. 12. 'There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.' He only hath power to bind the conscience. And therefore to him obedience is due from all to whom he has prescribed laws.

I come now to deduce some inferences.

Inf. 1. Does God require from men obedience to his revealed will? Then, in whatsoever state a man is, he owes obedience to the will of God; and therefore, in the saddest of sufferings, even in hell, men properly sin against God,—For this obedience is founded on the natural dependence of the creature on its Creator, and the creature can no more be free of it than it can be a god to itself. Much more God's exalting men in the world gives them no allowance to be vile. Whatever men's state be, God requires of them obedience to his will therein; and they are rebels if they withhold it, and shall be dealt with as such accordingly.

2. The doing of what God does not command can be no acceptable service or obedience to God. Our duty to God is not to be measured by our imaginations, but by the revealed will of God. Therefore, when men make those things to be duties which no revelation from the Lord makes to be so, the Lord may well say, 'who hath required these things at your hand?' Nothing but what is commanded of God can lawfully be the object of our duty.

3. Those who never heard the gospel will not be condemned for their not believing it; for the revelation of God's will must go before our actual obligation to do it, Rom. ii. 12. 'As many as have sinned without law, [that is, the written or revealed law of God] shall also perish without law.' This ought to stir up all who bear the Christian name, to be vigorous and lively in obeying God, particularly the great command of believing in the name of his Son; as considering, that whosoever doth not so obey and believe the gospel, shall be damned, Mark xvi. 16.

4. All men are allowed for themselves to examine the will of their superiors, whether in church or state, to see whether it be not against the will of God; and if it be so, not to obey it, 1 Cor. x. 15. The Bereans were commended for so doing, Acts xvii. 11. There is a difference betwixt subjection and obedience. These two may be separated in our dealings with men that are our superiors; we may and must refuse obedience to them in evil actions, while subjection to them remains in other things. Thus the apostles shewed subjection to the Jewish rulers, while they refused to obey their unlawful commands, Acts iv. 8, 9, 19. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, when they in any respect clash with his written word. To obey men's unlawful commands, is to sin against God. But in our relation to God, we owe him both subjection and obedience in all things.

5. Let us remember then, that we owe a duty to God, and that is, that we obey his will. Let us therefore lay out ourselves to do his will, and give that sincere, constant, tender, ready, universal, and perfect obedience to him in all things which he requires, looking for acceptance with God through the merits and mediation of Christ; praying to him, that he may graciously forgive all our acts of disobedience, and cover our very imperfect and sinful obedience with the perfect and complete obedience of his Son, who fulfilled all righteousness in the room of his people.

6. *Lastly*, Let believers be excited to yield this obedience to the will of God, as they have the most noble encouragement thereto, namely, that whatever God requires of them as an article of duty, there is a promise of ability and strength for the performance thereof contained in his word. Thus he says, Ezek. xxxvi. 27. 'I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.'—The Lord puts no piece of service in the hands of his people, but he will afford them sufficient supplies of grace for the doing thereof. Let them not, then, decline any duty he lays before them.