

## A DISCOURSE OF OBEDIENCE.

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*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*—JOHN XV. 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 using this parable was occasioned, as some think, by Christ's passing by some vineyards, whence he raises a discourse to spiritualise their meditations upon the view of the creatures. Whether this were so or no, yet the discourse is excellent, both to shew 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, but 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, ver. 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 prevalency of their prayers with God, if his words did practically and fruitfully abide in them. Ver. 7, 'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.'

(3.) From the glory of God and honour of Christ which are furthered by it, ver. 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 you bear much fruit; so shall you 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, ver. 9. You have had evidence of my Father's love to me, in his witnessing my mission 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: ver. 10, 'If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father's will, and abide in his love.' 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, ver. 11, that what I have spoken of to you is so much out of an authority or an imperiousness, as out of an affection to you and your interest. 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, ver. 13, for 'greater love can no man shew than to lay down his life for his friend;' and you shall see I will not go backward to discover the highest affection to you; and as I discover my affection to you in laying down my life, so you can discover your affection to me only by observing my commands.

So that the verse lies between two arguments to urge them to it.

(1.) His own love to them, which was of the highest stamp, ver. 13.

(2.) The revelation he had made to them, which was the fullest, ver. 15. 'All things that he had heard of his Father,' and the clearest, those that he had made known to them; so that you have my love to oblige you, and my revelation to direct you. As I have had love to purchase what you want, so you must have love to perform what I order: 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' He invites them to it by an honourable title of friends. You shall be ranked in the number of them, and continue in this dignity, if you keep my commands. I do not press this of loving one another, that you should perform this only and neglect the rest, for you are not my friends in the practice of one of my precepts unless you join the practice of other precepts to it.

*Ye are my friends.* Actively, you will declare and manifest yourselves to be my friends in conforming yourselves to my mind. Passively, I will declare myself to you. I have treated you as friends\* in imparting the counsels of God to you, not known to others. It is fit you should treat me as your friend in gratifying me in obedience to my commands. The dignity of a friend to Christ may well soften the hardness of a command. He doth not so call them friends as that they should forget that they are his servants and he their Lord; for as he mentions friendship as their privilege, so he mentions his will by the way of a command to make them sensible of their duty: 'If you do whatsoever I command you.' It is a great honour (saith Austin) to call those his friends whom he knows to be his servants.

*Ye.*

1. All of ye. It is universal. Men are too narrow to have many intimates, but the heart of Christ is large enough for all. Friendship with Christ is the privilege of every obedient person.

2. Ye, though poor, considered as men. Outward distress is no hindrance to spiritual relation.

3. Ye disciples, apostles employed for God, yet not my friends unless you obey me. Not gifts, but grace; not the highest employment, but exact practice interests men in this privilege.

*Are, not shall be.* You are doth not exclude the future, but assures them of it. They shall be because they are. It is not a thing to be waited for, but at present possessed.

*If you do whatsoever I command you.* Adam had a precept,† which, if he had kept, he had continued in the love of God; and Christ hath given us precepts which, if we keep, we shall continue in the love of Christ. Obedience is necessary, not by way of merit, but condition. He shews how grateful

\* Muscul.

† Ibid.

obedience is to him, because he dignifies the practiser of it with such a title, which how honourable is it for us, and how necessary for our welfare.

The text is made up of privilege and duty, relation and action.

1. Privilege and relation : *friends*.

2. Duty and action : *if ye do*.

Observe, 1, how glorious is the relation of a holy soul to Christ! He doth not say, I love you if you keep my commandments. A man may love his servant or his beast, but admits them not to special friendship; the condition of the one and the incapacity of the other will not suffer it. This title is higher than an assurance of a bare love; he loves them as friends as well as servants.

2. How condescending is the love of Christ! He calls the worms of the earth the friends of God. We cannot be his servants unless we keep his commands; and by keeping his commands we commence a higher degree than that of servants, even that of friends.

3. Christ's commands, not his deeds, are the object of our obedience. Set not before you what I do, but what I order you to do. Our conformity to Christ consists not so much in an imitation of what he did as in an obedience to what he prescribes; the example of Christ is not our rule without the precept of Christ. Some actions of Christ are unimitable, but all his commands are obeyable.

4. Privilege is entailed only to duty.

That which I intend is only the nature of obedience, as deducible from these words, 'If ye do whatsoever I command you.'

1. *Do*.

(1.) Obedience must be positive. Not only avoid what I prohibit. It consists not merely in not bringing forth bad fruit, but in bringing forth good. It is not enough to forbear the commissions of sin, if we are guilty of the omissions of duty. The fig-tree was not cursed because it brought forth bad fruit, but because it brought forth no fruit, Mat. xxi. 19. No father will be content with his child in forbearing what he forbids, unless he also performs what he prescribes. Many, like the pharisees, please themselves with negatives, I am not profane, a drunkard, swearer; but what title is procured to the privilege in the text, if as much cannot be spoken of positives as may be of negatives? We must be as careful to do what he wills, as to shun what he hates. He never 'puts off the old man' cordially, that hath not also put on the new, Col. iii. 8, 10. It is not a true friendship to omit what may displease a friend, if we do not also what may gratify him. God would have an obedience from us suitable to the happiness he promiseth us. He doth not only free us from hell and wrath, but invest us with heaven and happiness, so he would have us not only delivered from sin but created to good works. And you know that our Saviour is not only called Jesus because he 'saves from sin,' Mat. i. 21, but Christ, because he is appointed by God to govern, fit, and prepare souls for heaven.

(2.) Do it as friends. Obedience must be sincere. An action may look like a friendly act when there is nothing of friendship and good will in the heart. Every precept requires not only an outward but an inward conformity, not only a bodily action but a spiritual frame. God would not have the skin of a sacrifice without the flesh and entrails, nor the carcase of obedience without truth in the inward parts, Ps. li. 6. Christ intends not only an outward appearance, but respects the form of every action. Duties are not differenced by the outward garb, but inward frame. Waters may have the same colour, yet one may be sweet and the other brackish. Two apples may have the same colour, yet one may be a crab, and the other of

a delightful relish. A serpent hath a speckled skin, but an inward poison. We must look to the rule, that the matter of our actions be suited to it, otherwise we may commit gross wickedness, as they did who thought they did God good service by killing his righteous servants, John xvi. 2. We must also look to the frame of our hearts, otherwise we may be guilty of gross hypocrisy. A friendly action cannot come from the heart of an enemy, no more than good fruit from a corrupt tree. It may have a specious appearance when the heart is rank, as a man with a stinking breath holding a perfume in his mouth smells sweet; the sweetness is not from his breath, but the perfume, which takes not away the foulness of his stomach, or the corruption of his lungs. Christ cannot count any service from a rotten heart of any worth. A multitude of them are but as cyphers, signify nothing without a figure in the front: Prov. x. 20, 'The heart of a wicked man is little worth.' Sound actions cannot spring from a corrupt heart, no more than sweet water from a bitter fountain. He that considers not how his heart stands, whether it were wound up, whether it were in tune, whether it were melted, or whether it were frozen, that doth not care how drowsy and unsavoury his spirit was, doth not anything as a friend to Christ.

(3.) Do as friends; obedience must be affectionate. It must be love 'out of a pure mind,' 1 Tim. i. 5. In the command of charity, which is the special command before the text, the greatest outward assistances are of no value without this ingredient, but the least with it are highly accepted. A cup of cold water, Mat. x. 42, a little box of ointment with an affectionate respect to God, are valued and registered. As mercies are not welcome to a good man without God's love in them, so our services are not welcome to God without our love in them. A little bread and drink with God's love is better than great riches with his displeasure. Job's boils and rags with God's love were richer than his enemies' robes, and a starving Lazarus better than a rich epicure. A drop of service with affection to God is more worth than all the works of men without it. It is no argument of friendship for a man to send a rich cabinet to another with something in it, to which he knows his friend hath an antipathy. Splendid services to Christ without glowing affections are of the same nature. Christ would have us imitate him; he gives himself with his special mercies, and we must give ourselves with our special duties. But how often are some duties performed, not out of love to Christ, but love to ourselves? Judas his carrying the bag might be one cause of Judas his obedience to Christ, that he might get some advantage by it; and when he saw a greater offered by the pharisees, he deserted and betrayed him. *Fac me Episcopum Romanum*, saith one, *et ero Christianus*. When men pretend service to God to catch preferments from men, when they make a profession of religion to cheat more craftily, *Ut sub Christiano nomine lucrosius pereant*, this is not to do what Christ commands, but what we affect.

(4.) Do. Not be constrained to do, but do willingly, freely. What Paul would not have servants give to their masters, Eph. vi. 6, that many men give to God, an eye-service. While men have some serious thoughts of God's omniscience, they may pay him some service, as a servant may work while his master's eye is upon him or his feet at the door, but make a mock at him when his back is turned. Or they may do it out of fear of judgment. This may be a motive to quicken, but not the spring to give the first life to our obedience. A man may be very free in obedience, but upon a wrong motive, as schoolboys may get their lessons well one day, not out of love to their books, but that they may play the next; or as a child at play, called by his father to go upon an errand, runs faster than his father would have him,

puts himself all in a sweat. This might be thought a very free and willing obedience, but it is not so much obedience to his father as a gratifying himself in a speedy return to his game, and pursuance of it without any more disturbance. Or there may be a readiness when an obedience will suit to corruption. This is such an obedience as the devil is for. He was much for Job's trial, which God was also for. God orders him to deprive Job of his estate, that thereby his sincerity might be evidenced to the world, and the devil conforms himself to God's order out of malice to ruin him, hoping that hypocrisy would issue out instead of sincerity.

[1.] There is a freedom as opposed to constraint. It is not the act itself, but the naturalness of it, is a sign of obedience. A constrained obedience may consist with a devillish nature, and therefore cannot be a sign of a friendship to Christ. The devil obeys God, but by force; he is forced to a negative obedience, and sometimes to a positive obedience, not by any conscience of a command, but by a constraint by God's power; as Luke viii. 28, when Christ commanded him to come out of his long-possessed habitation. There may be a constraint by education, which is scarce sensible, when that upon a profane man is more visible. As a rugged stone will move no further than a strong arm will throw it, so a profane man moves no farther than his conscience, or some fear of man, throws him in any duty of obedience. But a man that hath the advantage of a religious education is like a stone smoothed into a right figure, that moves upon a plain at the least touch, yet there is constraint goes to that motion, though not so sensible, because the parts are by an outward smoothness fitted for such a motion; so it is with a man that is smoothed by education.

But the obedience Christ requires is to be free. Good actions are therefore called fruits of righteousness, fruits of holiness; because as a tree brings forth fruits naturally, so doth a true Christian bring forth righteousness. The gardener helps, indeed, by watering and digging, but doth not constrain the tree. God helps the man at the first conversion, but doth not force the soul. In Gal. v. 19, 22, it is observed that sins are called works, and graces called fruits, to shew the freedom of a holy, and the servile frame of a wicked, man. A good man is not put upon a duty merely by a sudden fit and importunity of conscience; as wicked men naturally lay in provision for their lusts, so do good men labour to lay in provision for their obedience and graces. The law, like a schoolmaster, scourgeth some truant souls to obedience, but the gospel gives a willingness of spirit in the day of power, Ps. cx. 3. The difference between these two powers is, the law is a powerful constrainer, mixed with severe threatenings that drive to fear, and the gospel is a powerful constraint, mixed with kind promises which help to love.

[2.] Freedom, as opposed to dulness and heaviness. God's delight in a holy person is rendered as one reason of his mercy: Ps. xviii. 19, 'He delivered me, because he delighted in me;' and our delight in Christ should be the reason of our duty. 'If ye do whatsoever I command you.' It is not a lumpish and heavy action that Christ requires; he requires such an obedience of us as himself performed to his Father: John xv. 10, 'If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.' That was not a heavy motion; it was his 'meat and drink to do his Father's will,' John iv. 34. Meat and drink are not only naturally desired, but delightfully received. Cheerfulness accompanies election of a thing: Ps. cxix. 173, 174, 'I have chosen thy precepts, and thy law is my delight.' Lumpishness is a sign we never chose it, but were forced to it. Sin is sweet to a wicked man, as a dainty to a glutton's palate, Job x. 12. He accounts duty his burden, and

a true disciple accounts it his honour. He, like the sun, rejoiceth to run, and when he is in service, his heart cries out, with Peter in the mount, 'It is good to be here.' Such cheerfulness in service procures cheerfulness in mercies : Isa. lxiv. 5, 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and works righteousness.' He puts to his hand to help such an one. Christ loves not melancholy and phlegmatic service ; such a temper in acts of obedience is a disgrace to God and to religion : to God, it betrays us to have jealous thoughts of God, as though he were a hard master ; to religion, it makes others think duties are drudgeries, and not privileges. Well, then, so much of cheerfulness in obedience, so much of a Christian temper ; so much of dulness, so much of an antichristian frame.

The disciples of Christ have not this liveliness in a constant equality. The wings of the soul drenched in sin, as well as the wings of a bird bemired, will flag. A good man's heaviness is from infirmities and distempers. A strong, active man may be laid upon his sickbed, and be loath to be stirred, but a carnal man's heaviness is from nature and willingness. A wicked man's heaviness is at his duty, a good man's heaviness is at his own deficiency ; his delight consists in the spirit, for the flesh is weak, and will never in this world be otherwise.

(5.) Do *whatsoever*, &c. Not lazily ; obedience must be diligent. God cares not for a slow obedience ; he would not therefore have an ass offered in sacrifice, Exod. xiii. 13, but would have it redeemed with a lamb, or the neck of it broke. A true Christian is like a seraphim, that hath six wings to fly upon God's errands, Isa. vi. 2 ; or like the living creatures, Ezek. i. 14, that ran and returned at the appearance of a flash of lightning, which is the quickest motion. Sound members move at the command of the will, whereas palsy members must be dragged along. Man naturally would have a ready God, and not a ready heart ; he would have a God ready to attend his complaints, but would not have a heart ready to attend God's commands. But good men take God at a word of precept, when he hath any work for them to do, as well as at a word of promise, when they have any wants for him to supply. Hypocrites may be obedient in promises, as the son in the Gospel, Mat. xxi. 29, 30, that promised to go into the vineyard. A good man doth more without open resolving, another resolves more without open doing. A master will take it ill if a servant disputes his commands. Paul set about the work he was ordered quickly : Gal. i. 16, 'I consulted not with flesh and blood ;' he called not flesh and blood into a cabinet council. What we do for Christ, we must do without advising with corruption, which is an enemy to God and his ways. Such counsellors will furnish us with evasions to slip from our duty, and represent things either impossible or unreasonable ; either that it cannot be done at all, or else it may be done better at another time ; and as it is said of our own nation, we lose more by treaties than we gain by war, so it may be said of our corruption, we lose more by such treaties than we gain by an open war against it. God would employ Moses though he had a slow speech, but checks him for his slow obedience. Abraham was as quick in his observance of God's command as Moses was slow : Gen. xvii. 23, 'The self-same day' wherein he had received the command of circumcision he put it in practice ; he would make no pauses, lest carnal reason should step in with objections. The readiness of the Gentiles to obey Christ is expressed : Ps. xviii. 44, 'As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me ;' like Elisha, who, upon Elijah's spreading his mantle over him, leaves his father, and oxen, and plough, and runs after him. The more of fire there is in anything, the more active it is ; the more of a divine Spirit, the more vigorous.

(6.) Do *whatsoever*, &c., constantly; not do it for a spurt, or by fits and starts. Obedience must be constant; it is that which God longs for: Deut. v. 29, 'Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them!' and it will never be well with a man till he doth it.

[1.] In sinning times it should be most conspicuous. Good men should 'shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,' Philip. ii. 15. The stars shine clearest in the darkest, if unclouded, nights. Good men are like fountains, hottest in the coldest seasons. When did David love and esteem God's precepts, but when men had made void his law? Ps. cxix. 126-128. He would double his valuation of, and obedience to, God's commands, when he saw them most violated by others. He brings in a double *Therefore*, 'Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right.' The more men despised them, the more he valued them, because he knew they were most dear to God, since they were most hateful to man. David had been refreshed by God when he was afflicted, and he would most please God when he was dishonoured. Wisdom, *i. e.* Christ, justifies her children in the sight of her adversaries; they should therefore justify wisdom in the sight of her enemies. Christ would have his people bear witness, by their profession and practice, against the sins of the times, as well as he will judge and condemn the world at last with them by their approbation. Thus Joseph of Arimathea would go boldly to Pilate to beg the body of Jesus, though the malice of the age had risen so high as to put him to death, when he was never mentioned in Scripture till that action. Sinful times increase the wickedness of the wicked, but strengthen the graces of the godly, for they make them more watchful, and watchfulness makes them the more practical. We then declare ourselves most the friends of Christ, when we own him among a multitude of enemies. Opposition makes God take notice of our obedience in a special manner. Probably Judas his repining at Mary's kindness in anointing Christ, was the occasion that the scent of that ointment was spread about the world.

[2.] In suffering times. In suffering times from God, as in desertion. Christ's obedience was eminent, he would obey God when God had forsaken him. A true disciple is not, like Saul, impatient to wait upon God when he hides his face, and run to a witch for counsel: 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' Job. xiii. 15. To obey Christ when he manifests his love, is obedience to ourselves; to obey him when he veils himself, is pure love and obedience to him.

In suffering times from men. Many would be obedient to their advantage; but to be obedient to death, is the property of a true disciple, Rev. iii. 21, as it was of his Master, Philip. ii. 8. Misery makes men oftener forget their virtues than their vices. Many are like the Jews, to cry *Hosanna* when Christ rides in triumph; and presently after, when he is condemned, either fly from him or vote against him; like snakes that come out of their holes in a hot day to sun themselves, and at night retreat to skulk in their caverns. Many come to live by Christ, but not die for him. Shame, mocks, scoffing, did not hinder Christ from dying for us; why should shame and reproaches hinder us from dying for Christ. The apostle speaks of cleaving to that which is good, Rom. xii. 9, *κολλωμενοι*; things glued are not easily separated. We should cleave so close to him that nothing should part us from him. Wind will not blow a snail, or any other glutinous substance, off a tree.

Well, then, constancy is an ingredient in the obedience Christ requires. His trees bring forth fruit in old age, Ps. xcii. 14. Age makes other things decay, but makes a Christian flourish. Some are like hot horses, mettlesome at the beginning of a journey, and tired a long time before they come to their journey's end. A good disciple, as he would not have from God a temporary happiness, so he would not give to God a temporary obedience; as he would have his glory last as long as God lives, so he would have his obedience last as long as he lives. Judas had a fair beginning, but destroyed all in the end by betraying his Master.

2. The subject of this doing. *Ye*, it must be the whole man. Not *do* with a part of yourselves, but your whole selves; there must be a resignation of the whole soul to God. The tables of the law were written on both sides, Exod. xxxii. 15, 16, so must obedience be upon every faculty. Ahab, Herod, and the stony ground were partial in their obedience, like 'Ephraim, a cake not turned,' Hosea vii. 8, baked on one side and dough on the other; *Intus Nero, foras Cato*, saith Jerome. But our obedience to Christ must answer our former enmity; as that was spread over the whole soul, so must this. There must be an enlightened understanding, flexible will, tender conscience, regulated affections, watchful members to go upon the errands of God. As the father said to the prodigal, 'All that I have is thine,' so must the soul to Christ, Lord, all that I have is thine, understanding, will, affections, &c. The holocausts among the Israelites were wholly burnt; so are we wholly to sacrifice ourselves.

3. The object. *Whatsoever*, *Osa*, as many things as I command you. Not think it enough to perform one or two, but every one whatsoever. And so he taught the apostles to teach others, Mat. xxviii. 20. Christ performed every command of his Father, and we must perform every command of Christ. He is not a man after God's own heart that doth not 'fulfil all his will,' it is David's commendation that he did so, Acts xiii. 22. Josiah hath the same character left upon record, both for the universality of the subject, and the universality of the object: 2 Kings xxiii. 35, 'He turned to the Lord with all his soul, according to all the law of Moses.' An habitual disposition there must be, that must pass into act, where a particular command, and an opportunity of observing it, meet together. No command but is so good, so just, so holy, that it deserves our compliance with it in the highest pitch, and when we cannot equal it we are to bewail our defects. Obedience is quite out of tune if any one command be slighted. The lute is incapable of making music if one string, the treble, be broken. When the people went to gather manna on the Sabbath, and so broke the law, God taxes them with a violation of the whole, Exod. xvi. 27, 28. To neglect any one command is disingenuous. Would we have all our sins pardoned, and shall we not be willing to have all God's commands performed? It is also dangerous. If a man be to go ten miles, and only go nine of them, he had as good never have set out, he will never come to his journey's end.

(1.) Whatsoever I command you, in the true meaning and design of it. Not like the pharisees, who, though they do not blot out the law, yet enervate it by false glosses and interpretations, and so make it insignificant, taking away the life and soul of a command.

(2.) Whatsoever I command you, though it may seem mean and low in the eyes of men. As Christ did not think anything too low to do for us, we must not think anything too mean to do for him. Whatsoever is accounted vile that is for the honour of Christ, we should endeavour to be more vile in it. We have David's vote for it, that it was 'better to be a doorkeeper in the house of God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.' The least duty



must be performed ; art shews itself most in little works, so doth grace its excellency in the performance of the least commands. *Natura triumphat in minimis*, a fly shews God's power as well as the world. The least mite in sincerity is acceptable to God, as well as the greatest hecatomb, or a sacrifice of the beasts upon a thousand hills. The least command should be as dear to a gracious soul as the greatest. We are not to waive the greatest because of its difficulty, nor despise the least because of its littleness. A jewel is not accounted vile because it is little, nor should a command because it is mean. He that breaks the least command, shall be least in the kingdom of heaven.

4. The person commanding: 'Whatsoever I command you.\* The authority of Christ must be eyed in all obedience, and his command be made the rule. When we do the matter of the law, without an eye to the authority that enacts, it is an obedience to the law, but not to the lawgiver. Men may perform the matter of a law, yet despise the authority of the lawgiver in their hearts. We are not so much to consider, saith Jerome, *imperii quantitatem*, as *imperantis dignitatem*. We are not only to observe Christ as a friend, but obey him as a sovereign. He that is the king's friend must not forget that he is also the king's subject. What he doth as a friend in a way of kindness, he must perform also as a subject in a way of duty. We must glorify Christ as Christ, *i. e.* in all the relations wherein he stands to us. Now he is not only our Saviour, but our king, and we are not only his friends, but his servants. What we receive from God should be received as from him: 1 Thess. ii. 13, 'Ye received the word as the word of God.' What we do to God, should be done as to him, suitable to his divine greatness and majesty. Obedience must be performed because Christ commands, and as Christ commands it.

Use 1. It informs us of the excellency of the Christian religion. It demands the greatest purity, and confers the greatest privilege. It brings us to the rule of God, and invests us with the friendship of our Creator. No religion hath so much of benefit, and so much of duty. Nothing enforceth such exactness in the ways of God. Nothing bestows so much of happiness upon the creature. In other religions something is indulged to gain proselytes, and carnal rewards are proposed to invite them. The precepts of this are holy and the rewards high ; other religions consist in negatives, this in positives. The gospel discovers more sin, and exacts more holiness. It affords us matter of love, not fear, for our principle ; not force to constrain, but grace to persuade. Gospel obedience is not the fruit of bondage, but the fruit of love and friendship.

2. Obedience is our privilege as well as our duty. It admits us into the friendship of Christ. The bitterest duty is sugared with this unspeakable comfort. Those that stand idle in the market-place meet with no such reward. It is no small honour to be a king's friend ; how unconceivable is the honour to be a friend of Christ ! 'In keeping his commands there is great reward.† This is a reward above the highest descent. Enoch was descended but the seventh from Adam, yet this was not his honour, but his walking with God. To be a friend of Christ in rags, is a greater honour than to be king of the whole world in purple robes. Jerome, speaking of a Roman senator, saith, He was noble, not because *Consularis*, but *Christianus*. The very act of an holy obedience gives a sweeter reflection than all the pleasures of the world. Christ, indeed, calls the gospel a yoke, but an easy one. He calls it a yoke, as natural men think it, not as gracious men

\* *Εγώ* emphatically added.

† *Imperium Dei beneficium est.—Hierom.*

find it, for it is a privilege more than a yoke. Christ discovers the glory of his love in the heart, as God did the glory of his presence in the temple.

3. How inexcusable are disobedient professors. The greater the honour proposed as an invitation, the greater the sin in refusing the terms upon which that honour may be enjoyed. It had been worth the enduring the torments of some thousands of years, to come at last to the privilege of being the friends of Christ. But no such thing is required; it is not parting with the first-born of our bodies, or searching out thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil; it is not suffering the flames of hell for a finite multitude of years; no impossible or rigid penances are enjoined; only 'Do whatsoever I command you,' and his 'commands are not grievous' in the experience of those that have tried them, 1 John v. 3. What an unreasonable thing is it not to part with dung for gold, with rags for robes, with misery for happiness, with hell for heaven, with sin for Christ! He that would refuse to be a prince's favourite upon the performance of an easy task, deserves, without pity, to be spurned out of the court; and what excuse can that person have that will not exchange the slavery of the devil for the friendship of the Redeemer? Can any blame Christ at last for refusing any relation to them, and bidding them depart from him, when they here refused his friendship, and would have nothing to do with him?

4. How much comfort and encouragement may be drawn from hence under all reproaches. Who would regard the barking of dogs in the doing of that which hath an excellent honour entailed upon it? The devil regards not the opinions men have of him; he looks not upon their curses as his loss, because he is of an higher nature; he pursues his business. Shall a diabolical nature slight that which a divine nature shall not surmount? Shall not curses here, and torments at the end, discourage him from venting his malice against God, and prosecuting his devilish designs? and shall reproaches discourage any from that obedience which is attended with so great an honour? What is it to be reproached and scorned here a little time, while the favour of God is enjoyed, and after a few nights' sleep we are to be raised out of the dust to glory, to enjoy his friendship for ever, and to be in glory where he is? This would be a support when the bullets fly fast about our ears. It is impossible to be faint-hearted with lively thoughts of so great an honour. Weigh seriously this honour, and then weigh the obstructions, and see whether the latter be not overbalanced by the former. Would a glorified saint, incarnate again in the world, decline the practice of obedience upon such a gallant encouragement, because of reproaches? Men might as soon persuade him to fry in hell as to part with so great an honour upon so light an opposition. The rolling of a black cloud over a traveller's head will not cause him to break off a necessary journey to court, to become the king's friend or his son-in-law.

5. What an incentive 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, much more will he 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,' Cant. vii. 12; viii. 2. It is by this you shew yourselves the friends of Christ; by this you maintain his honour in the world. This is a silent conviction upon others, and makes them have some veneration 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 we glorify God and Christ, Mat. v. 16, *i. e.* make others speak well of the ways of religion. Let this honour 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 Alexander watches for kingdoms. It is a poor-spirited Domitian that loves to catch flies. 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, supplanters 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: 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 favour or enmity of Christ. What know I but this action may open a door to the favour 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 honour 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 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 favour which 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 ingenuous natures, to be accounted the friends of God and Christ, 'if we do whatsoever he commands us.'

END OF VOL. IV.

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