

OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S REVEALED WILL.

DEUT. xxvii. 9, 10. *Take heed and hearken, O Israel, this day thou art become the people of the Lord thy God; thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the Lord thy God, and do his commandments.*

Q. XXXIX. *WHAT is the duty that God requireth of man?*

Ans. Obedience to his revealed will.

It is not enough to hear God's voice, but we must obey. Obedience is a part of that honour we owe to God, Mal. i. 6. 'If I be a Father, where is my honour?' Obedience carries in it the life-blood of religion. 'Obey the voice of the Lord God, and do his commandments.' Obedience without knowledge is blind, and knowledge without obedience is lame. Rachel was fair to look upon; but, being barren, said, 'Give me children, or I die:' so, if knowledge doth not bring forth the child of obedience, it will die, 1 Sam. xv. 22. 'To obey is better than sacrifice.' Saul thought it was enough for him to offer sacrifices, though he disobeyed God's command: no, 'to obey is better than sacrifice.' God disclaims sacrifice, if obedience be wanting, Jer. vii. 22. 'I spake not to your fathers concerning burnt-offerings, but this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice.' Not but that God did enjoin those religious rites of worship; but the meaning is, God looked chiefly at obedience; without which, sacrifice was but devout folly. The end why God hath given us his laws, is obedience, Lev. xviii. 4. 'Ye shall do my judgments, and keep my ordinances.' What doth a king publish an edict but that it may be observed;

Q. 1. *What is the rule of obedience?*

Ans. The written word, that is, proper obedience which the word requires; our obedience must correspond with the word, as the copy with the original. To seem to be zealous, if it be not according to the word, is not obedience, but will-worship, Popish traditions, which have no footing in the word, are abominable; and God will say, *Quis quesivet hæc?* Who hath required this at your hand? Isa. i. 12. The apostle condemns the worshipping of angels, which had a shew of humility, Col. ii. 18. The Jews might say they were loth to be so bold as to go to God in their own persons, they would be more humble, and prostrate themselves before the angels, and desire them to present their petitions to God; this shew of humility was hateful to God, because there was no word to warrant it.

Q. 2. *What are the right ingredients in our obedience to make it acceptable? how must it be qualified?*

Ans. 1. Obedience must be *cum animi prohubio*, free and cheerful, else it is penance, not sacrifice, Isa. i. 19. 'If ye be willing and obedient.' Tho' we serve God with weakness, let it be with willingness. You love to see your servants go cheerfully about your work. Under the law, God would have a free-will offering, Deut. xvi. 10. Hypocrites obey God grudgingly, and against their will; they do *facere bonum*, but not *velle*. Cain brought his sacrifice, but not his heart. 'Tis a true rule, *Quicquid cor non facit, non fit*: what the heart doth not, is not done. Willingness is the soul of obedience; God sometimes accepts of willingness without the work, but never of the work without willingness. Cheerfulness shews that there is love in the duty; and love doth to our services, as the sun doth to the fruit, mellow and ripen them, and make them come off with a better relish.

2. Obedience must be devout and fervent, Rom. xii. 11. 'Fervent in spirit,' &c. *Quæ ebullit præ ardore*; it alludes to water that boils over: so the heart must boil over with hot affections in the service of God. The glorious angels, who, for their burning in fervour and devotion, are called Seraphims; these God chuseth to serve him in heaven. The snail under the law was unclean, because a dull slothful creature: obedience without fervency, is like a sacrifice without fire. Why should not our obedience be lively and fervent? God deserves the flower and strength of our affections. Donitian would not have his statue carved in wood or iron, but in gold; lively affections make golden services. It is fervency makes obedience acceptable; Elijah was fervent in spirit, and his prayer opened and shut heaven: and again he prayed, and fire fell on his enemies, 2 Kings i. 10. Elijah's prayer fetched fire from heaven, because, being fervent, it carried fire up to heaven: *quicquid decorum ex fide proficitur*. Aug.

3. Obedience must be extensive, it must reach to all God's commands, Psal. cxix. 6. 'Then shall I not be ashamed, (or, as it is in the Hebrew, *lo Ehofti*, blush) when I have respect to all thy commandments. *Quicquid propter Deum fit equaliter fit*. There is a stamp of divine authority upon all God's commands; and, if I obey one precept because God commands, I must obey all: true obedience runs through all duties of religion, as the blood through all the veins, or the sun through all the signs of the zodiac. A good Christian makes gospel-piety and moral equity kiss each other. Herein some discover their hypocrisy, they will obey God in some things which are more facile, and may raise their repute; but other things they leave undone, Mark x. 21. 'One thing is lacking,' *unum deest*.

Herod would hear John Baptist, but not leave his incest: some will pray, but not give alms; others will give alms, but not pray, Mat. xxiii. 23. 'Ye pay tithes of mint and anise, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.' The badger hath one foot shorter than the other: so these are shorter in some duties than in others. God likes not such partial servants, that will do some part of the work he sets them about, and leave the other undone.

4. Obedience must be sincere, viz. We must aim at the glory of God in it. *Finis specificat actionem*; in religion the end is all. The end of our obedience must not be to stop the mouth of conscience, or to gain applause or preferment; but that we may grow more like God, and bring more glory to God, 1 Cor. x. 31. 'Do all to the glory of God.' That which hath spoiled many glorious actions, and made them lose their reward, is, when men's aims have been wrong: the Pharisees gave alms, but blew a trumpet, that they might have glory of men, Mat. vi. 2. alms should shine, but not blaze. Jehu did well in destroying the Baal-worshippers, and God commended him for it; but, because his aims were not good (he aimed at settling himself in the kingdom) therefore God looked upon it as no better than murder, Hos. i. 4. 'I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.' O let us look to our ends in obedience; it is possible the action may be right, and not the heart, 2 Chron. xxv. 2. 'Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.' Two things are chiefly to be eyed in obedience, the principle, and the end: a child of God though he shoots short in his obedience, yet he takes a right aim.

5. Obedience must be in and through Christ, Eph. i. 6. 'He hath accepted us in the beloved.' Not our obedience, but Christ's merits, procure acceptance: we must, in every part of worship tender up Christ to God in the arms of our faith: unless we serve God thus, in hope and confidence of Christ's merits, we do rather provoke God, than please him. As, when king Uzziah would offer incense without a priest, God was angry with him, and struck him with leprosy, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16. so when we do not come to God in and through Christ, we offer up incense to God without a priest; and what can we expect but severe rebukes?

6. Obedience must be constant, Psal. cvi. 3. 'Blessed is he who doth righteousness at all times.' True obedience is not like an high colour in a fit, but it is a right sanguine; it is like the fire on the altar, which was always kept burning, Lev. vi. 13. Hypocrites' obedience is but for a season; it is like plaistering work, which is soon washed off: but true obedience is constant: tho' we meet with affliction, we must go on in our

obedience, Job xvii. 9. 'The righteous shall hold on his way.' We have vowed constancy; we have vowed to renounce the pomp and vanities of the world, and to fight under Christ's banner to death. When a servant hath entered into covenant with his master, and the indentures are sealed, then he cannot go back, he must serve out his time: there are indentures drawn in baptism, and in the Lord's supper the indentures are renewed and sealed on our part, that we will be faithful and constant in our obedience; therefore we must imitate Christ, who became obedient to the death, Phil. ii. 8. The crown is set upon the head of perseverance, Rev. ii. 26. 'He that keeps my words unto the end, to him will I give the morning-star.'

Use 1. This indicts such who live in a contradiction to this text: they have cast off the yoke of obedience, Jer. xlv. 16. 'As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee.' God bids men pray in their family, they live in the total neglect of it: he bids them sanctify the sabbath, they follow their pleasures on that day: God bids them abstain from the appearance of sin, they do not abstain from the act; they live in the act of revenge, in the act of uncleanness. This is an high contempt of God; it is rebellion, and rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.

Q. Whence is it that men do not obey God? They know their duty, yet do it not?

Ans. 1. The not obeying of God is for want of faith, Isa. liii. 1. *Quis credidet?* 'Who hath believed our report?' Did men believe sin were so bitter, that hell followed at the heels of it, would they go on in sin? Did they believe there were such a reward for the righteous, that godliness were gain, would they not pursue it? but they are atheists, not fully captivated into the belief of these things; hence it is they obey not. This is Satan's master-piece, his draw-net by which he drags millions to hell, by keeping them in infidelity; he knows, if he can but keep them from believing the truth, he is sure to keep them from obeying it.

2. The not obeying God is for want of self-denial. God commands one thing, and men's lusts command another; and they will rather die than deny their lusts: now, if lust cannot be denied God cannot be obeyed.

Use 2. Obey God's voice. This is the beauty of a Christian.

Q. What are the great arguments or incentives to obedience?

Ans. 1. Obedience makes us precious to God; we shall be his favourites, Exod. xix. 5. 'If ye will obey my voice, ye shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: you shall be my portion, my jewels, the apple of mine eye, 'I will give kingdoms for your ransom.' Isa. xliii. 3.

2. There is nothing lost by obedience. To obey God's will

is the way to have our will. (1.) Would we have a blessing in our estates, let us obey, Deut. xxviii. 1, 3. 'If thou shalt hearken to the voice of the Lord, to do all his commandments, blessed shalt thou be in the field: blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.' To obey, is the best way to thrive in our estates. (2.) Would we have a blessing in our souls, let us obey, Jer. vii. 23. 'Obey, and I will be your God.' My Spirit shall be your guide, sanctifier, and comforter, Heb. v. 9. 'Christ became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.' While we please God, we please ourselves; while we give him the duty, he gives us the dowry. We are apt to say, as Amaziah, 2 Chron. xxv. 9. 'What shall we do for the hundred talents?' You see you lose nothing by obeying; the obedient son hath the inheritance settled on him. Obey, and you shall have a kingdom, Luke xii. 32. 'It is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.'

3. What a sin disobedience is; *1st*, It is an irrational sin. (1.) We are not able to stand it out in defiance against God, 1 Cor. x. 22. 'Are we stronger than he?' will the sinner go to measure arms with God? he is the Father Almighty, who can command legions: if we have no strength to resist him, it is irrational to disobey him. 2. It is irrational; as it is against all law and equity: we have our daily subsistence from God; in him we live and move: is it not equal, that as we live by him, we should live to him? that as God gives us our allowance, so we should give him our allegiance?

2dly, It is a destructive sin, 2 Theff. i. 7, 8. 'The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that obey not the gospel.' He who refuseth to obey God's will in commanding, shall be sure to obey his will in punishing. The sinner, while he thinks to slip the knot of obedience twists the cord of his own damnation; he perisheth without excuse; he hath no plea or apology to make for himself, Luke xii. 47. 'The servant which knew his lord's will, but did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.' God will say why did you not obey? you know how to do good, but did it not; therefore your blood is upon your own head.

Q. *What means shall we use that we may obey?*

Ans. 1. *Serious consideration.* Consider, God's commands are not grievous: he commands nothing unreasonable, 1 John v. 3. It is easier to obey the commands of God than sin: the commands of sin are burthensome; let a man be under the power of any lust; how doth he tire himself? what hazards doth he run, even to the endangering his health and soul, that he may satisfy his lusts? what tedious journies did Antiochus Epiphanes take in persecuting the Jews? Jer. ix. 5. 'They weary

themselves to commit iniquity :’ and are not God’s commands more easy to obey ? Chrysoftom faith, virtue is easier than vice ; temperance is less burdesome than drunkenness. Some have gone with less pains to heaven, than others have to hell.

Consideration 2. God commands nothing but what is beneficial, Deut. x. 12, 13. ‘ O Israel, what doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to keep his statutes, which I command thee this day, for thy good ?’ To obey God, is not so much our duty as our privilege : his commands carry meat in the mouth of them. He bids us repent ; and why ? that our sins may be blotted out, Acts ii. 19. He commands us to believe ; and why ? that we may be saved, Acts xvi. 31. There is love in every command : as if a king should bid one of his subjects dig in a gold mine, then take the gold to himself.

2. *Earnest supplication.* Implore the help of the Spirit to carry us on in obedience : God’s Spirit makes obedience easy and delightful. If the load-stone draw the iron, now it is not hard for the iron to move : If God’s Spirit quicken and draw the heart, now it is not hard to obey. When a gale of the Spirit blows, now we go full sail in obedience. Turn that promise into a prayer, Ezek. xxxvi. 27. ‘ I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.’ The promise encourageth us, the Spirit enables us to obedience.

OF LOVE.

THE rule of obedience being the moral law, comprehended in the Ten Commandments, the next question is,

Qu. XLII. *What is the sum of the Ten Commandments ?*

Ans. The sum of the Ten Commandments is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and our neighbour as ourselves.

Deut. vi. 5. ‘ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.’ The duty called for, is love, yea, the strength of love, ‘ with all thy heart :’ God will lose none of our love. Love is the soul of religion, and that which goes to the right constituting a Christian : love is the queen of the graces ; it shines and sparkles in God’s eye, as the precious stones did on the breast-plate of Aaron.

Qu. 1. *What is love ?*

Ans. It is an holy fire kindled in the affections, whereby a Christian is carried out strongly after God as the supreme God.