

# PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY Part 3: Authority in Christian Practice Chapter 10 EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE

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## Transcript

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Part 3: Authority in Christian Practice

Chapter 10

EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE

No matter how cautiously one may deal with obedience, if he is to be of any service to the real people of God, his efforts are sure to be put to a wrong and evil use by hypocrites, for they will "wrest it, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). Such is the perversity of human nature. When a discriminating sermon is preached, the particular design of which is to draw a clear line of demarcation between genuine and nominal Christians, and "take forth the precious from the vile" (Jer. 15:19), the graceless professor will refuse to make application of the same and examine his own heart and life in the light thereof; whereas the possessor of Divine life is only too apt to draw a wrong deduction and deem himself to be numbered among the spiritually dead. Contrariwise, if the message be one of comfort to God's little ones, while too many of them are afraid to receive it, others who are not entitled will misappropriate it unto themselves. But let not a realization of these things prevent the minister of the Gospel from discharging his duty, and while being careful not to cast the children's bread unto the dogs, yet the presence of such is not to deter him from setting before the children their legitimate portion. Before developing our theme, we will define our terms. "Evangelical obedience" is obviously the opposite of legal, and that is of two sorts. First, the flawless and constant conformity unto His revealed will which God required from Adam and which He still demands from all who are under the Covenant of Works; for though man has lost his power to perform, God has not relinquished His right to insist upon what is His just due. Second, the obedience of unregenerate formalists, which is unacceptable unto God, not only because it is full of defects, but because it issues from a natural principle, is not done in faith, and is rendered in a mercenary spirit, and therefore consists of "dead works." Evangelical is also to be distinguished from imputed obedience. It is blessedly true that when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God reckons to the account of all the subjects of the Covenant of Grace the perfect obedience of their Surety, so that He pronounces them justified, or possessed of that righteousness which the Law requires. Yet that is not the

only obedience which characterizes the redeemed. They now personally regulate their lives by God's commands and walk in the way of His precepts; and though their performances have many blemishes in them (as they are well aware), yet God is pleased for Christ's sake to accept the same. It should need no long and laborious argument to demonstrate that God must require obedience, full and hearty obedience, from every rational agent, for only thus does He enforce His moral government over the same. The one who is indebted to God for his being and sustenance is obviously under binding obligations to love Him with all his heart, serve Him with all might, and seek to glorify Him in all that he does. For God to issue commands is for Him to impose His authority on the one He has made; for him to comply is but to acknowledge his creaturehood and render that submission which becomes such. It is as the Lawgiver that God maintains His sovereignty, and it is by our obedience that we acknowledge the same. Accordingly we find that upon the day of his creation Adam was placed under law, and his continued prosperity was made dependent upon his conformity thereto. In like manner, when the Lord took the nation of Israel into covenant relationship with Himself, He personally made known His laws unto them and the sanctions attached thereto. There are no exceptions to what has just been pointed out. The inhabitants of heaven, equally with those of earth, are required to be in subjection to their Maker. Of the angels it is said they "do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word" (Ps. 103:20). When His own Son became incarnate and assumed creature form, He too entered the place of obedience and became subservient to God's will. Thus it is with His redeemed. So far from the subjects of the Covenant of Grace being released from submission to the Divine Law, they are under additional obligations to render a joyful and unqualified obedience to it. "Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently" (119:4). Upon which Manton said, "Unless you mean to renounce the sovereign majesty of God, and put Him besides the throne, and break out into open rebellion against Him, you must do what He has commanded. 'Charge them that be rich' (1 Tim. 1:9)—not only advise, but charge them!" Christ is Lord as well as Saviour, and we value Him not as the latter unless we honour Him as the former (John 13:13). Not only does God require obedience, but an obedience which issues from, is animated by, and is an expression of, love. At the very heart of the Divine Decalogue are the words "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments" (Ex. 20:6). While there must be respect for His authority, unless there is also a sense of God's goodness, and an outgoing of the affections unto Him because of His excellency, there can be no hearty and acceptable obedience. The severest self-denials and the most lavish gifts are of no value in God's esteem unless they are prompted by love. The inseparability of love and obedience was made plain by Christ when He said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John 14:27). "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14:27). Likewise taught His apostles: "This is the love of God: that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). "Love is the fulfilling [not a substitute for, still less the abrogation] of the Law" (Rom. 13:10), for it inspires its performance. To proceed one step farther: God has graciously promised to work obedience in His people. "I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments and do them" (Ezek. 36:27)—He would not only point out the way, but move them to go therein; not force by external violence, but induce by an inward principle. "They shall all have one Shepherd: they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes" (Ezek. 37:24). Christ makes them willing in the day of His power that He should rule over them, and then directs them by the sceptre of His righteousness. Under the new covenant God has engaged Himself to create in His people, by regenerating grace, a disposition which will find the spirituality and holiness of His requirements congenial unto it. "I will put My laws into their minds and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10): 1 will bestow upon them a new nature which will incite unto obedience and cause them to delight in My Law after the inward man. Herein lies a part of their essential conformity unto Christ: "I delight to do

Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy Law is within My heart" (Ps. 40:8). In accordance with those promises, we find that in the ministry of Christ two things were outstandingly prominent: His enforcement of the claims of God's righteousness and His proclamation of Divine grace unto those who felt their deep need. Matthew 5:17-20; 19:16-21; 22:36-40, exemplify the former; Matthew 11:4-6, 28-30; 15:30, 31; Luke 23:42, 43; John 4:10, illustrate the latter. The Son of God came not to this earth in order to open a door unto self-pleasing and loose living, but rather to maintain God's holiness and make it possible for fallen creatures to live a holy life. Christ came here not only as a Saviour, but as a Lawgiver (Deut. 18:18, 19), "to be Ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:2), and therefore is He "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9). His mission had for its design not to lessen God's authority or man's responsibility, but to put His people into a greater capacity for serving God. Hence we find Him saying to His disciples, "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14); and when commissioning His servants, He bade them teach believers "to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Love to God and our neighbor is indeed the great duty enjoined by Law (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 10:18) and Gospel alike (Gal. 5:13, 14), yet is it a love which manifests itself by a hearty obedience (2 John 6). Though Christ delivers from the curse of the Law, yet not from its precepts: "That we, being delivered out of the hand of our [spiritual] enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74, 75). Every privilege of the Gospel entails an added obligation upon its recipient. As creatures it is our bounden duty to be in entire subjection to our Creator; as new creatures in Christ it doubly behooves us to serve God cheerfully. It is a great mistake to suppose that grace sets aside the claims of righteousness, or that the Law of God demands less from the saved than it does from the unsaved. Nowhere are the high demands of God set forth more fully and forcibly than in the epistles addressed to the saints. Take these as samples: "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15); "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:10). But right here a formidable difficulty presents itself. On the one hand the renewed soul clearly perceives the necessity and propriety of such a standard being set before him, and cordially acquiesces therein; yet on the other hand he has to acknowledge "to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18). Though it is his deepest longing to measure up fully to the Divine standard, yet he is incapable of doing so; and though he cries earnestly unto God for enabling grace and unquestionably receives no little assistance from Him, yet at the close of this life his desire remains far from being realized. Now the healthy Christian is deeply exercised over this, and instead of excusing his failures cries, "O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes" (Ps. 119:5). But that is only half of the problem, and the least difficult half at that. The other half is, How is it possible for a holy God to accept and approve of imperfect obedience from His children? That He will not lower His standard to the level of their infirmities is clear from the passages quoted above; yet that He does both graciously receive and reward their faulty performances is equally plain from other verses. In what has just been stated we discover one of the fundamental differences between the Covenants of Works and Grace. Under the former a rigorous and inflexible demand was made for perfect and perpetual conformity to God's Law, and no allowance or relief was afforded for the slightest infraction of it. A single default, the least failure, was reckoned guilty of breaking all the commandments (James 2:10), for not only are they, like so many links in the same chain, a strict unit, but the authority of the Lawgiver behind them was flouted. Nor was any provision made for the recovery of such a one. The constitution under Which the first man, and the whole human race in him, was placed was without any mediator or sacrifice, and no matter how deep his remorse, or what resolutions of amendment he made, the transgressor lay under the inexorable sentence: "The soul that sinneth it shall die," for God will by no means clear the guilty. Moreover, under the first covenant, God provided no special grace to enable its

subjects to meet His requirements. He made man in His own image, and pronounced him "very good," and then left him to his native and created strength. Finally, under that covenant man was required to yield obedience in order to his justification, for upon his compliance he was entitled unto a reward. Now under the Covenant of Grace everything is the very opposite of that which obtained under the Covenant of Works. Complete subordination to the Divine will is indeed required of us, yet not in order to our justification before and acceptance with God. Instead, the moment we believe on the Lord Jesus and place our whole dependence on the sufficiency of His sacrifice, His perfect obedience is reckoned to our account, and God pronounces us righteous in the high court of heaven and entitled to the reward of His Law. Consequently our subsequent obedience is rendered neither under threat of damnation nor from a mercenary spirit, but out of gratitude for our deliverance from the wrath to come and because of our acceptance in the Beloved. Nor are we left to our own strength, or rather weakness. God does not barely command us, and then leave us to ourselves, but works in us both to will and to do His good pleasure. He communicates to us His blessed Spirit and makes available that fullness of grace and truth which there is in Christ our Head, for He is not only a Head of authority, but also of efficacious influence: "From whom the whole Body [Church] fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part" (Eph. 4:16). What is yet more to the point in connection with our immediate subject, under the New Covenant provision has been made for the failures of its subjects. God does not reject their obedience because it is faulty, but graciously accepts the same when it is prompted by submission to His authority, is performed by faith, is urged by love, and is done with sincerity of purpose and endeavour. Sin has disabled from an exact keeping of God's commandments, but He approves of what issues from an upright heart and which unfeignedly seeks to please Him. We are bidden to "have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably [not flawlessly!] with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:29). While God still justly requires from us a perfect and perpetual obedience, nevertheless He is graciously pleased to receive and own genuine efforts to conform to His will. He does so because of the merits of Christ and His continued mediation on our behalf. Having accepted our persons He also accepts our love-offerings—note the order in Genesis 4:4. We present spiritual sacrifices unto Him, and they are "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). That we are here propounding no new and dangerous error will be seen from the following quotations. "Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in Him: not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unproveable in God's sight, but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, though accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections" (Westminster Confession). "I call it Gospel obedience, not that it differs in substance from that required by the Law, which enjoins us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, but that it moves upon principles, and is carried on unto ends, revealed only in the Gospel" (John Owen). According to the modification of the new covenant, "God, out of His love and mercy in Christ Jesus, accepts of such a measure of love and obedience as answereth to the measure of sanctification received" (Manton). Though the above quotations are far from being Divinely inspired, and therefore are without any binding authority upon the children of God, nevertheless, they are from men who were deeply taught and much used by the Holy Spirit, and so are deserving of our serious and prayerful attention. While the Christian is forbidden to call any man "father," that is far from signifying that he should despise such teachers. There is no Antinomian laxity in the above citations, but a holy balance such as is scarcely ever found in the ministry of our day. We have pointed out that God justly requires a perfect obedience from all rational creatures, and that under no circumstances will He lower His demand. Every regenerate soul concurs with God's holy claim, and deeply laments his inability to meet that claim. We also affirmed that under the moderation of the New Covenant constitution God is graciously

pleased to accept and approve of an obedience from His people which, though sincerely desiring and endeavoring to measure up to His perfect standard, is, through their remaining corruptions and infirmities, a very defective one; and that He does so without any reflection upon His honour. We followed that brief averment by giving excerpts from some of the Puritans—the number of which might easily be multiplied—not for the purpose of buttressing our own teaching, but in order that it might be seen that we are not advancing here any dangerous or strange doctrine. Nevertheless, the majority of our readers will require something from an infinitely higher authority than that on which to rest their faith, and to it we now turn. In Genesis 26:5, we find the Lord declaring: "Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge—My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." Yet he did not do so perfectly, for he was a man "subject to like passions as we are"; nevertheless God owned his obedience, and, as the context there shows, rewarded him for the same. Sincere obedience, though it be not sinless, is acceptable unto God; if it were not, then it would be impossible for any of His children to perform a single act in this life which was pleasing in His sight. Not only so, but many statements made in the Scriptures concerning saints would be quite unintelligible to us—statements which oblige us to believe that God receives the hearty yet imperfect endeavors of His people; yea, that He attributes unto the same a far higher quality than they do. Thus, He said of Job "that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil" (1:1): yet as we read all that is recorded of him it soon becomes apparent that he, like ourselves, was "compassed with infirmity." When the Lord declared concerning David His servant that "he kept My commandments and My statutes" (1 Kings 11:34), He was speaking relatively and not absolutely. "The Lord delights in the way of a good man" (Ps. 37:23), notwithstanding that he often stumbles, yea, falls, in the same. There are but two classes of people in the sight of God: "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2) and "obedient children" (1 Pet. 1:14), yet many a regenerate soul is fearful of classifying himself with the latter. But he ought not—his scruples are due to an insufficiently enlightened conscience. When the Lord Jesus said to the Father of those whom He had given Him, "they have kept Thy Word" (John 17:8), surely it is obvious that He was not affirming that their obedience was perfect. "Evangelical keeping is filial and sincere obedience. Those imperfections Christ pardoneth, when He looketh back and seeth many errors and defects in the life, as long as we bewail sin, seek remission, strive to attain perfection. All the commandments are accounted kept when that which is not done is pardoned" (Manton). When the heart beats true to Him, Christ makes full allowance for our frailties. With the Word of God in his hands there is no excuse for anyone who has, by Divine grace, been brought to hate sin and love God to stumble over the point we are now treating of. David had many failings and some of a gross and grievous nature, yet he hesitated not to say unto God himself: "I have kept Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:56). In what sense had he done so? Inwardly: in spirit, in holy resolution and earnest endeavour; outwardly too in the general current of his life; and wherein he failed, he deeply repented and obtained forgiveness from God. Christ will yet say to each one who has improved the talents entrusted to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21), yet that is far from implying that therein he was without fault or failure. When Paul prayed for the Hebrew saints that God would make them "perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight," he was making request for those indwelt by sin, as his added "acceptable through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:21) necessarily implied. "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments" (1 John 3:22) would have no comfort for us if God accepted only sinless obedience. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Those words are capable of more than one legitimate application, but they are peculiarly pertinent here. True, God is very far from being indifferent to the substance of our obedience, yet the spirit in which it is performed is what He notices first. Duties are not distinguished by their external form, but by their internal frame—one may perform the same duty from fear or compulsion which another does freely and out of love. "Waters may have the same

appearance, yet one be sweet and the other brackish. Two apples may have the same color, yet one may be a crab and the other of a delightful relish. We must look to the Rule that the matter of our actions are suited to it; otherwise we may commit gross wickedness, as those did who thought that they did God service by killing His righteous servants (John 16:2). We must look also to the face of our hearts, otherwise we may be guilty of gross hypocrisy" (S. Charnock). The Pharisees kept the sabbath with great strictness, yet their outward conformity unto that Divine Law was far from being acceptable in God's sight. "The Lord weigheth the spirits" (Prov. 16:2). That has a meaning which should make each of us tremble; yet it should also be of great comfort to the regenerate, and evoke thanksgiving. If on the one hand the omniscient One cannot be imposed upon by the most pious appearance and utterances of the hypocrite, yet on the other He knows those "who desire to fear His name" (Neh. 1:11), even though some of their actions proceed from a contrary principle. All the intentions and motives of our hearts are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, and full consideration is given thereto as God estimates our performances. Was not this very truth both the comfort and confidence of erring Peter when he declared to his Master: "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that [contrary to appearances] I [really and truly] love Thee" (John 21:17). "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities [the shortcomings of Thy full and righteous demands] . . . who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Not one of His people. But, as the next verse goes on to assure us, "there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared"—yes, held in awe, and not trifled with. Blessed balance of truth! "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8:12): upon which Matthew Henry's commentary says: "The willing mind is accepted when accompanied with sincere endeavors. When men purpose that which is good and endeavour according to their ability to perform also, God will accept of what they have or can do, and not reject them for what they have not and what is not in their power to do; and this is true as to other things besides the work of charity." Yet it was prudently added: "But let us note here, that this Scripture will not justify those who think good meanings are enough, or that good purposes and the profession of a willing mind are sufficient to save them. It is accepted indeed, where there is a performance as far as we are able." A readiness of disposition is what God regards, and that disposition is judged by Him according to the resources which are at its command. Our Father estimates what we render unto Him by the purity of our intentions. Little is regarded as much when love prompts it. If the heart be really in it, the offering is well pleasing to Him whether it be but "two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24) or tens of thousands of oxen and sheep (1 Kings 8:63). "The Covenant of Grace insists not so much upon the measure and degree of our obedience, as on the quality and nature of every degree—that it be sincere and upright" (Ezek. Hopkins). In contrast with legal obedience, evangelical consists of honest aims and genuine efforts, striving to live holily and to walk closely with God, according to the rules He has prescribed in His Word, and, according to the gracious condescension, yet equity, of the Gospel, is received and rewarded by God for Christ's sake. That holy purposes and sincere resolutions are accepted by God, though they be not really accomplished, is clear from what is recorded of Abraham, namely that "he offered up his son" (James 2:21), for he never actually "offered up" Isaac, except in intention and willingness. Upon which Manton said: "God counteth that to be done which is about to be done, and taketh notice of what is in the heart, though it be not brought to practice and realization. Yet not idle purposes when men hope to do tomorrow what should and can be done today." "We make it our aim, whether at home [in the body] or absent, to be well pleasing unto Him" (2 Cor. 5:9) must be our grand and constant endeavour. Another example to the point is the case of David, who desired and planned to provide a more suitable dwelling-place for Jehovah in Israel's midst. As Solomon, at a later date, declared: "But the Lord said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build a house for My name, thou didst well, in that it was in thine heart" (2 Chron. 6:8). God graciously accepted

the will for the deed, and credited His servant with the same. So it is with evangelical obedience: that which is truly sincere and is prompted by love unto God, though very imperfect, he graciously accepts as perfect. When He appeared before Abraham, the father of all them that believe, He declared, "I am the Almighty [all-sufficient] God, walk before Me and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1), which in the margin is accurately and helpfully rendered "upright or sincere," for absolute perfection is in this life impossible. Legal obedience was approved by justice, evangelical obedience is acceptable unto mercy. The former was according to the unabated rigor of the Law, which owned nothing short of a conformity without defect or intermission, whereas the latter is received by God through Christ according to the milder dispensation of the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). 2 Chronicles 30 records a very striking instance where God accepted the will for the deed, and enforced not the full requirements of His Law. "A multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did eat of the Passover otherwise than it was written. But he prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon everyone that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." Hezekiah apprehended God's mercy better than do some of His people today! "And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (verses 19, 20). Ah, but note well that the king had restricted his request unto those who had "prepared their hearts to seek"! Such uprightness was the very opposite of what we read of in Deuteronomy 29:19, 20: "And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man." Sincere obedience necessarily presupposes regeneration, for filial submission can proceed only from a real child of God. A spiritual life or "nature" is the principle of that obedience, for when we are renewed by God there is newness of conversation. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6)—disposed and fitted for spiritual things. Yet after renewal there still remains much ignorance in the understanding, impurity in the affections, perversity in the will, yet so as grace prevails over nature, holiness over sin, heavenliness over worldliness. "But the high places were not removed; nevertheless, Asa's heart was perfect [upright] with the Lord all his days" (1 Kings 15:14). Though God writes His Law on our hearts (Heb. 8:10), yet as Ezek. Hopkins pointed out, "This copy is eternally durable, yet it is but as a writing" upon sinking and leaky paper, which in this life is very obscure and full of blots." It is also termed "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5), because without faith it is impossible to please God; yet how feeble our faith is! It is therefore an obedience which is performed in reliance upon Christ's mediation (Rev. 8:3,4) and enablement (Phil. 4:13). But now we must endeavour to furnish a more definite and detailed answer to the pressing question: How am I to determine whether my obedience is really sincere and acceptable to God? By testing it with these criteria: First, is it one which, in its negative character, has a universal antipathy for sin? "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13)—such is the purity of that nature communicated to God's child at the new birth. Though evil still cleaves to and indwells him, yet his heart loathes it. His hatred of evil is evidenced by dreading and resisting it, by forsaking it in his affections and denying self, by bitterly mourning when overcome by it and confessing the same unto God, by exercising the contrary graces and cultivating the love of holiness. Where there exists this fear of the Lord which abhors evil, it will make no reserve or exception, nor tolerate or "allow" any form or phase of it. Instead, it will aver with the Psalmist: "I hate every false way" (119:104, 128), because contrary to the God I love, and as polluting to my soul. Second, is it one which diligently endeavors to regulate the inner man as well as the outer? God's requirement is: "My son, forget not My law, but let thine heart keep My commandments" (Prov. 3:1). It was at this point that the hypocritical Pharisees failed so completely, for, said Christ: "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and all

uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). The Lord has bidden us "keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23), and that calls for the checking of sinful thoughts, the mortifying of evil imaginations, the resisting of pride, self-will and unbelief; the scrutinizing of our motives and aims, and making conscience of temptations and occasions to sin. Third, is it one which has the glory of God for its aim? The heart is very deceitful, and much of human religion is prompted by nothing higher than to be "seen of men" and gain a reputation for personal piety. How searching are those words: "he that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory" (John 7:18)! True piety is modest and self-effacing, aiming only at honoring the Lord and pleasing Him. Fourth, is it one which has an appropriation of the whole revealed will of God, enabling me to say, "I esteem all Thy precepts" (Ps. 119: 128)?—for the willful rejection of one is the virtual of all. Though we fail miserably in some, and keep none of them perfectly, yet do our hearts approve of every duty enjoined? Fifth, is there a genuine willingness and honest desire to render full obedience unto God? If so, we shall not voluntarily and allowedly fall short of the highest perfection, but have an equal regard unto every Divine statute, not dispensing with nor excusing ourselves from the most severe and difficult. Sixth, is there a firm resolution ("I have sworn, and I will perform it"—119:106), a genuine effort ("I have inclined my heart to perform Thy statutes alway"—119:112), a persevering industry ("reaching forth unto those things which are before" and "pressing toward the mark"—Phil. 3:12-14), an assiduous striving to please God in all things? Seventh, is it accompanied by a conscience which testifies that though only too often I transgress, yet I loathe myself for it, and honestly endeavour to conform to the whole of God's will? Such an obedience God accepts and accounts perfect, because the falls are due to the subtlety of Satan, the deceitfulness of sin and the weakness of the flesh, rather than to a deliberate defiance and determined obstinacy. Nowhere else in Scripture are the character and conduct of a saint so clearly and fully delineated as in Psalm 119, and the conscientious Christian should frequently compare himself with it. All through that Psalm we find holy resolution and earnest endeavour side by side with conscious weakness and frailty but dependence upon God. "Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently" (4)—"O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes" (5)—"I will keep Thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly" (8)—"With my whole heart have I sought Thee: O let me not wander from Thy commandments" (10)—"I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart" (32)—"Consider how I love Thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to Thy lovingkindness" (159)—"Let Thine hand help me; for I have chosen Thy precepts" (173). Thus there are both holy yearning and activity, yet constant looking to God for strength and enablement. Thus will it be seen that sincere obedience consists not of a sinless conformity to God's will, but of genuine desires and proportionate efforts after it. It comprises two parts: the mortification of our corrupt affections and the vivification of our graces, so that we increase in strength and make further advances in true piety. So also has it two adjuncts or attendants: repentance for past sins, and the exercise of faith for present grace. Failures are reflected upon with hatred and shame, are confessed to God with sorrow and contrition, earnestly resolving and endeavoring to abstain from any further repetition of them. Faith looks to the merits of Christ, pleads the virtues of His blood, rests upon His intercession for us in heaven, lays hold of the promises, and counts upon God's acceptance of our imperfect obedience for His Son's sake, knowing that it deserves not His approbation, and is rewarded (Ps. 19:11) not as a matter of debt, but of pure grace. Then let none conclude that they have no grace because there are so many imperfections in their obedience: a child may be weak and sickly, yet a legitimate one! Renew your repentance daily, rely wholly on the mediation of Christ, and draw upon His fullness.

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