

Positive Divine Law

by Benjamin Franklin

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience to Positive Divine Law as a test of faith and devotion to God, regardless of human understanding.

Scripture: Genesis 22:1, Exodus 12:1, Numbers 21:8, Joshua 6:1, Mark 16:16

Topics: "Divine Authority", "Faith Obedience"

Description

Benjamin Franklin preaches about the distinction between positive divine law and moral law, emphasizing the importance of obedience to God's commandments even when they may not seem to have intrinsic value or reason. He uses examples from the Bible, such as the obedience of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and the Israelites' obedience in various situations, to illustrate the significance of faith and submission to divine authority. Franklin highlights the trials of faith faced by individuals like Naaman, Joshua, and those who were commanded to be baptized, showing that true obedience requires trust in God's wisdom and authority, even when His commands may not be fully understood.

Transcript

IN THE Bible we have what has been designated positive divine law. On the other hand, we have what is called moral law. We have also positive divine institutions, positive appointments and positive commandments. We have also moral institutions, moral appointments and moral commandments. In positive law there are positive institutions, positive requirements or commandments. Moral law relates to that which is right in itself, always was right, and requires things to be done because they are right. The things it requires can be seen to be right in the reason and fitness of things, and will be readily admitted to be right--not because any authority requires them, but because they can be seen to be right in the nature of things. It always was right to speak the truth, and wrong to speak a lie; and moral law requires the former, because it is right, and forbids the latter because it is wrong. The same is true of all moral requirements. They are all required because they are right.

But positive divine law is of a higher order than this. It has the force to make that right which is not right intrinsically in itself, and is the highest [125] test of respect for divine authority known to man. It is also the greatest trial of faith ever applied to man. It is intended to penetrate down into the heart, and try the heart, the piety, the devotion to God. The very acts that some men have irreverently styled, "mere outward acts," "mere external performances," are the Lord's tests of the state of the heart, intended to penetrate deep down into the inmost depths of the soul, try the heart, the piety, the devotion to God. They try the faith. The

man that will obey a commandment, when he can not see that the thing commanded can do any good, or, it may be, that he can see pretty clearly that it can not do any good in itself, does it through respect to divine authority; does it solely to please God; does it solely because God commands it. This has no reference to popularity, pleasing men, or to the will of man, but it is purely in reference to the will of God. This is of faith; it is piety, devotion to God. It rises above mere morality, philosophy, or the pleasure of man, into the pure region of faith, confidence in the wisdom of God, and in submission to the supreme authority--yields to it reverently when no other reason can be seen for it is only that the divine will requires it. The man in his heart says, "It must be done, because the absolute authority requires it."

There are three degrees in this before it can reach the highest test, the greatest trial of faith. 1. To obey when we can not see that the thing commanded can do any good in itself. 2. To obey when we can [126] see pretty clearly that the thing commanded can not do any good in itself. 3. To obey when we can see that the thing commanded is clearly wrong in itself, morally speaking. It tries the state of heart, the faith, the devotion to Him who commanded, to obey a command when we can not see that the thing commanded can do any good in itself. The test is greater, and the trial more severe, when we can see clearly that the thing commanded can not do any good in itself. The test is greatest, and the trial of faith most severe, when we can see that the thing commanded is clearly wrong in itself, but only made right by the arbitrary force of the absolute authority. This will all appear presently.

The first Scripture adduced is found in Exodus xii. 1-13, and is intended as an illustration of the principle involved in the theme of the present discourse. A lamb was required to be slain, and the blood sprinkled on the door-posts of all the houses in which the Israelites were dwelling while they were yet in Egypt. The promise was, that when the Lord should pass through, destroying the first-born, he would pass over every house where the blood was sprinkled on the door-post, and leave the first-born alive. But in every house where the blood was not sprinkled on the door-posts, the first-born should be destroyed. No man could see any philosophical connection between the thing commanded to be done and the end had in view. What an opening there was here for a modern doctor, who talks of [127] essentials, and non-essentials, outward ceremonies, external rites, etc., to have puzzled Moses! How many pert questions he could have propounded! He could have inquired of Moses, "Do you think there is any saving efficacy in the blood of a lamb to save the life of the first-born? Why apply the blood to the door-post? Could not the Lord see which houses the Israelites were in without the blood on the doorpost? Why must it be a lamb without blemish? Could not the Lord save the first-born in Israel without this outward ceremony?"

Unbelieving and hard-hearted, as many of the Jews were, it does not appear from the history that there was a man among them sufficiently skeptical to come before Moses with any such rebellious talk as this. Moses and Aaron were not men of this type. They gave heed to no such irreverent and unworthy talk. They believed God, regarded his wisdom, and did what he commanded, without inquiring what good it would do, or anything about the efficacy of the blood of a lamb, or what power it would have, sprinkled on the door-post, to save the first-born in the house. They believed God, and had all confidence in his wisdom and goodness--that he was wise enough to know what to command, and good enough to command that which ought to be done. They never inquired, when he commanded a thing, why he commanded it, or why he did not require something else; but took it for granted that the very circumstance that he commanded it was sufficient for [128] them; and they obeyed because he commanded it, and not because they could see why he commanded it. How did it turn out in the end? It turned out that in one hour, the hour of midnight, the first-born in every house where the blood was not sprinkled on the door-posts was dead! The first-born in every house where the blood was sprinkled on the doorpost was saved alive! Precisely as far as

obedience went life was preserved, or salvation was enjoyed; precisely as far as disobedience prevailed, death spread--there was no salvation. This is an awful warning to all who inquire, "What good will it do?" when God commands. Men talk of "the spirit of obedience!" This is precisely the thing wanting. "The spirit of obedience" will do what the Lord commands, because he commands it; but the spirit of disobedience will cavil at the Lord's commandments, and inquire, "What good will it do?" This comes of unbelief.

There is a statute in the law of Moses that forbids that any man, except a Levite, shall touch the ark of the covenant. The penalty for the violation of this law is, death. No man could see that it was any harm, in itself, for any man to touch the ark any more than for a Levite to do it. No man could see why it should not be touched, in anything, only that the Lord forbid it, and declared that he who did it should die. Here again is a test of respect for divine authority, a trial of faith. It can not be seen to be wrong to touch the ark, in itself. Why may [129] none but a priest touch it? No man can tell why, only that the Lord says he shall not. The commandment of God forbids it. This is enough for the man of faith. Faith requires this to be observed; unbelief inquires, "What harm is it to touch it?" Will not "the spirit of obedience" do, without the outward act? To touch the ark is a mere external performance, and has nothing to do with the heart? If a man is sincere, will he not be accepted of the Lord without doing the precise thing commanded? See 2 Samuel vi:7; 1 Chronicles xiii:11, and see how it turned out. What does the result show? A man, who appears to have been friendly to the ark, as it was borne along on the new cart, saw it shaking, and in danger of falling, and, though not a priest, put his hand against the ark to keep it from falling, and the moment he touched it he fell dead! What a warning in reference to good intentions, in doing what God forbids! It availed nothing that he was friendly to the ark; that he was honest; that he meant it all well; that he aimed to save the ark from falling! He was taking charge of the ark, caring for it, but not minding the commandment of the Lord. His good intentions, in doing what God forbid, led him to ruin and made him an example to warn all others to let their good intentions lead them to do what the Lord has commanded. He followed his own wisdom, not the wisdom of God.

The first commandment God ever gave to the human being was of the kind here introduced. It [130] was in these words: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."--Genesis ii:16, 17. No man can see any reason for interdicting that tree any more than any other tree in the garden. This case staggers unbelief. Paine, in his "Age of Reason," falsely so-called, inquired, "What harm was there in eating an apple?" In itself, no man can see that there was any harm in it. No one can see any reason for refraining from eating it, in the fruit itself, no matter whether an apple or other fruit; nor in anything connected with it, except that the Lord said: "Thou shalt not eat of it." The reason, and the only reason, for refusing to eat was that the supreme authority forbid it. It is not human reason, nor human wisdom, nor philosophy, nor science, that forbids it, but the absolute authority. Here comes a test. Will man obey when he can see no reason for doing so, only to please God? His appetite is against obedience. The trial is now to be made; the matter is to be tested. There is but one thing in favor of obedience--that is, the positive divine commandment. Will that prevail, or will it be set aside?

The first preacher that makes his appearance after the law was given was a false one. He was no legalist; he was not particular on the letter of the law. He obtained the most sacred audience on earth. Eve heard him. We have no full report of [131] his sermon. He had some method, and was a little of the modern Universalist type. His leading position was in these words: "God knows that you shall not surely die."

This point he undertook appeals, as follows:

1. To the human appetite. "That tree in the midst of the garden is good for food." No doubt he discoursed upon it beautifully, sweetly and lovingly, and made his appeal to the appetite in a most telling manner. Before we become harsh in our judgment in regard to Eve sinning, we ought to stop and consider how far we withstand appeals to the appetite. Please consider a case or two, and see how far the appetite prevails, and how far the judgment governs us. Go to that young friend, whom you love dearly, but who is falling into the habit of intoxication, and reason the case with him. Inquire of him, "Do you not know that this besetment will ruin you as a business man?" He will likely respond: "I do; I have already felt the sting of it." "Are you not aware that it will destroy your standing in society, and that moral, civil and pure people will shun your society?" He will answer you candidly: "I am aware of this also, and have already suffered from it." "Are you not sensible that it will destroy your constitution and ruin your health?" "I am," he cheerfully responds, "Do you not see that it will destroy your estate?" "I do; I have lost heavily by it already." "And do you not see that it will [132] destroy your family?" He replies, "I do; I have thought of all this." After he concedes all this, you make your appeal to him: "My dear sir, why do you not quit it?" Now comes the answer: "I have acquired an appetite almost insatiable and irresistible, and find no power to resist it!" Or, take a case more common, and one in which more men have had experience. Go to a man some forty-five years of age, and inquire of him, "What do you think of this popular habit of chewing, smoking and snuffing tobacco?" He candidly replies, "I think it is a filthy habit. I contracted it when I was a boy, and thought I could not be a man till I could chew tobacco; but I am sorry I ever contracted the habit." When he makes such a candid concession you appeal to him: "Why, then, my dear sir, do you not quit it?" "Quit it!" he replies. "I have acquired the appetite, and it demands it, and I find no power to resist it." Yet you talk about Eve partaking of the forbidden fruit.

2. The appeal to the appetite did not succeed with Eve, and the preacher proceeded to his second head, which consisted of an appeal to the lust of the eye. That tree is pleasant to the eye. We all know something of the lust of the eye, or ought to, when about one-third of all our hard earnings go for no purpose only for the gratification of the lust of the eye, and that, too, not our own eyes, but the eyes of other people. But this appeal to the lust of the eye did not succeed with Eve. [133]

3. The preacher proceeded to his third head, and made his final appeal to the wicked desire of the human heart for unlawful knowledge. That tree in the midst of the garden is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is good to make one wise. Eat of that and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. But you say you did not know there was any unlawful knowledge! Moses says, "Secret things belong to God, but revealed things to us and to our children forever." Alan has an orbit as certainly as the earth, or any of the heavenly bodies. Inside of that orbit all is free to him; outside of it he may not go. One of the most sensible books that has appeared in the past twenty years is styled, "Limitations of Human Thought." It maintains rightly that God has set limits to human thought, as certainly as he has to the waters of the ocean. Beyond these we can not in safety go. What mean all those poor degraded creatures, styled "fortune tellers?" They mean that they unfold the future, and reveal to you your fortune in time to come. What mean those poor deluded creatures, styled "spirit rappers," "spirit mediums," "table tippers?" They profess to give intelligence from the dead! What mean all those idle people who go to and consult these? They want the vail pulled aside, that they may see the future, and see what is coming to them, or to receive intelligence from the dead. Suppose the Lord would remove the vail, and let them see all that lies before them for the next ten or twenty [134] years! Would it add anything to their happiness? Surely not!

But this final appeal to the desire for unlawful knowledge did not succeed with Eve. What was the resort then? The preacher then assumed all the arrogance and importance possible, and made a most impudent

and defiant assertion: "God knows you shall not surely die." This assertion did what all his appeals had failed to do. It deceived Eve. Woman should be thankful for the relief afforded in this matter by a brief statement made by Paul, 1 Timothy ii.: "The woman being deceived was in the transgression." She did not sin knowingly. But in the same sentence Paul says, "Adam was not deceived." It may be, though it certainly can not be proved, that when Adam saw what was done--that Eve had sinned and was separated from God--that he looked at her, as she stood by his side, and reflected that she was the dearest object to him on earth, made for an helpmeet for him, "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh," and decided that if he stood with God he would be separated from her, and that he deliberately decided to go with her in the transgression, and be with her in suffering the penalty, and lay side by side in the grave. Be this as it may, Adam was not deceived. He sinned with his eyes wide open. Many a man has done the same thing since then.

But now for the consequences. What followed the "outward act," the "external performance?" [135] God had said: "Thou shalt not eat of it." "Thou shalt surely die." Here was the point in dispute. The tempter said, "You shall not surely die." The trial comes. "By sin came death." "Death entered into the world." For six thousand years the results have been spreading, in mourning, grief, suffering and death; and man will not learn obedience.

But now for a hard question. What would you do if you should come to a positive commandment that would come in direct collision with moral law? Do you say that such a thing can never occur? But such a thing did occur. The question is not whether it occurred, or can occur, but what would you do in a case of that kind? Do you say that you would obey the moral law, and let the positive go? But you say, "Where did a case of that kind occur?" It occurred when God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac. It was wrong to kill, and worse to kill a child, and worst to kill an only child. The Lord called "Abraham!" The venerable patriarch and servant of God, never ashamed, but always ready, responded, "Here am I." The Lord proceeded, "Take thy son," and, as if to give it force and penetrate into the depths of his soul, he added: "Thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

Remember, this man was no hardened Pagan, trained to human sacrifices; but a man whose whole training was averse to anything of this kind. What [136] does he do in the premises? What an opening was here for talk about essentials and non-essentials! for talk about "the spirit of obedience," without obedience itself! What a plausible speech might have been made, excusing himself from doing what was commanded! He might have urged that to execute this commandment will frustrate the promise of God, that "in his seed all nations shall be blessed." Then, it is contrary to the moral law. It is wrong to kill. Not only so, but the sentiments of filial affection, which God has implanted in his own breast, forbids that this thing shall be done; and even the common sentiments of humanity forbid it. Did Abraham institute any such reasoning? Not a word of it! No such unbelieving talk falls from his lips. God has spoken! The Jehovah has commanded! The Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth has commanded! There is but one way of it. That which has been commanded must be done.

We have no account of his consulting his wife, to ascertain what she thought of it. He listens to but one thing--that is, the voice of God. There is no equivocation, no inquiring whether some other way will not do as well. He calls Isaac to his side. No doubt Isaac appeared dearer to him than ever; but he falters not. He calls the servants, and bids them to prepare the wood for an offering and bring the beasts. All things are ready; the procession moves off. As they pass on, profound meditation is in the mind of the patriarch; his eye many times [137] rests upon the child; the solemn scene of offering his son, comes before him; the

tears trace down his furrowed face. Silently he moves on till the evening of the first day. They stop and worship God. They rise and worship on the morning of the second day, and pursue their journey. Oh, you of little faith, look at this man and you have before you an example of faith; not that caviling, carping and evasive thing that some style faith, that will not obey God; but the living, active and glorious faith that moves right on as the Lord commands.

On the evening of the second day the venerable man of God worships again. On the morning of the third day, the day the great trial is to come, he worships again. This day is to be one of trial; a trial of faith, of loyalty to God, of integrity, that is to go before all nations. "God tried Abraham!" The solemn little company proceed on till about noon, when, at a distance, they see the Mount Moriah. The patriarch turns to the servants, and bids them to remain there while he and the lad would "go yonder and worship." He and Isaac proceed up the mount till they reach the appointed place. An altar is prepared. When all was ready, Isaac, in the simplicity and innocence of a child, said: "My father, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" He had seen his father worship, no doubt, many a time, and knew what was necessary, but saw no lamb as usual. How his question must have pierced the heart of Abraham! He [138] answered, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." This he no doubt uttered by inspiration, but did not himself know how it would be fulfilled.

He now probably explained to Isaac what was to be done. He had never told him anything that was not true; never deceived him in anything; and Isaac believed that God had commanded it, and voluntarily yielded to it. This is most probably so from two considerations. 1. Abraham was from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and twenty-five years old, and Isaac from twenty to twenty-five years old, and that aged man could not have bound that strong young man, contrary to his will. 2. It adumbrated the offering to Christ, and he voluntarily offered himself when he had power to call twelve legions of angels to his assistance. The most reliable conclusion, therefore, is that when Isaac heard that God had commanded his father to offer him, he submissively yielded to it and voluntarily gave himself up to be offered. His father bound him and laid him on the altar, and, standing over him, lifted his hand with the deadly knife, and was calling up his energies to execute the commandment of God, and just before the fatal blow would have fallen God called out, "Abraham!" He promptly answered, "Here am I." God said, "Stay thy hand." He had gone so far that he had received Isaac from the dead in a figure. He had, in his mind, seen him struggling in death; his blood running down upon [139] the altar, and the flames devouring his flesh! But the scene is changed; Isaac is alive; and the words he had just uttered, probably without understanding their meaning, are literally fulfilled. God had "provided himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." He looked behind him and saw a lamb caught in a thicket; released Isaac; took that lamb and offered it.

How he and Isaac must have praised God, as they stood and saw the smoke of that offering ascend to heaven as a sweet incense!

That lamb pointed to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; and that transaction honored God, and Abraham was styled "the friend of God," and "the father of the children of God by faith." The Lord Jesus honored Abraham; the apostles honored him, and his name has gone down through the ages in honor, and will continue to do so, in view of that transaction, till the end of time; nor will time end the honor God has conferred on him, in view of his wonderful devotion to God, in withholding not his only son. Men talk of "Abraham's faith," who never walk in the steps of our father Abraham. When God commanded, his faith did not inquire, "What good will it do?" He has this put down to his credit--that he obeyed God. So much for this "outward performance;" this "external rite!"

In 2 Kings, chapter v., there is a case that sets forth the principle involved in this discourse. There was a captain, or more than is meant by a captain [140] in our day--a chieftain--a man in great power and wealth, whose worldly surroundings were favorable; but he was a leper. This was a drawback to all his fine worldly prospects. He had in his family a little captive maid, and she told her mistress that there was a prophet in Israel that could heal Naaman, her master. Naaman's wife informed him of this, and the captain determined to find this prophet. He went to the King of Syria and obtained a letter to the King of Israel and presented the letter. When the King of Israel read the letter he was excited, rent his clothes; thinking that he was required to heal the leper, and said: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" He thought that he was seeking a quarrel with him, and aimed to involve him in war. "When Elisha the man of God had heard that the King of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Accordingly Naaman was sent and stood before the door of the prophet in Israel. The prophet never went out. He was a different style of prophet from many in our day, or he would have gone out, and been seen bowing and scraping before the captain, and planning to get a big pile of his money. He sent a messenger out and told him to "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." [141]

The captain was insulted at this! "Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." He was indignant at such treatment, and said, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" He had not been brought up in that way. It was not according to his way of thinking. He "went away in a rage." His servants saw the madness and folly of the captain, and preached to him a short but excellent sermon, as follows: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" This simple-hearted reasoning overcame him. He yielded the point, went down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, and was made whole.

Never did any commandment have the appearance of a non-essential more than this one. No man could see how dipping in Jordan could heal leprosy, nor why he must dip seven times. He was not to be healed when he dipped once, nor twice, but seven times. When the Lord requires certain steps to be taken to obtain an object, the object, or end, is never obtained till the last step is taken, or the last item in the programme is performed. The prophet of God had something in view more than simply to heal a leper. He intended that Naaman should "know [142] that there was a prophet in Israel." This he made him know; for after he had healed him, Naaman said: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." He did not, by this transaction, show him that there was great efficacy in the water of Jordan, or in dipping in Jordan, but that there was a great God in Israel--above all gods--a God that could heal leprosy; and thus glorified the God of Israel. Naaman carried the name of the God of Israel home with him, and honored that name among his people.

While the Israelites were in the wilderness, they spake against God and against Moses, inquiring, "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died." The people came to Moses, making confession. They said: "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." The wickedest and hardest-hearted people will repent when a calamity comes, war, or pestilence, and desire prayers. Moses listened to them and prayed for them. See

Numbers xxi:8. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." [143]

Moses made the serpent of brass and put it upon a pole. What think you of this for an "outward performance," an "external rite?" etc. What think you many preachers in our day would have said of this pole and serpent? They would want to know whether there was virtue in the pole, in the brass, in looking, etc., etc., and whether they could not be saved some other way. Could not God save a man without looking? What good could it do to look at the brazen serpent? The wisdom of God was in this appointment. He intended that all men should know that there was nothing in the pole, the serpent, or looking, in itself, to save them. He intended that all men should see that it was not that they did that saved them, but that God saved them. Yet he did not please to save them without the pole, the serpent and the looking. He required them to submit to this appointment, as a test of their faith, a trial of their loyalty, in an act of submission that had nothing in it but submission to him. When they submitted, he demonstrated his approval by healing them.

Suppose Moses had prepared a liniment, and it would have healed every bitten Israelite, what would have been the result? Would it have given God the glory? Not at all! They would not have looked beyond the liniment, and nothing would have been heard of but the liniment, the liniment--the grand panacea! But no man thought the serpent healed any one, but that God healed them, and they gave [144] the glory to God. Joshua vi:1-27 we have more positive divine law. Joshua appears, connected with an army, in a siege against Jericho--though it is not now recollected that he is anywhere styled General Joshua. Jericho was like some places we have read about within the past fifteen years--it was not easy to take! They had tried their battering rams, and all the other engines they had for breaking down strong walls, and had utterly failed. Joshua went to the Lord for a war programme, and the Lord commanded him to march the army around the city once every day, for seven days, and on the seventh day to march round seven times; then to blow the trumpet and tell the men to shout. What a set of "outward performances" there was in this! What an amount of "external ceremony!" What an array of "non-essentials!" We have heard much of pious generals, praying generals, and the like, within the past few years; but how many of them had faith enough to have carried out this programme? Many of them, doubtless, would have preferred trusting to shells and solid shot. Modern chaplains, many of them, would have argued that marching round the walls was not essential; that blowing trumpets could avail nothing, and the shout of men could not break down the formidable walls of Jericho.

But Joshua was a man of faith. He did not expect the marching round the walls to throw them down, nor the blowing of the trumpet, nor the shout [145] of the men; but he believed the Lord would throw down the walls and give them the victory; and what they had to do was to obey him. All men can see that what they were commanded to do could not, in itself, accomplish the object, or have any tendency to do it. God could have thrown down the walls without their doing anything, just as well as with it, so far as we can see. Why, then did he command the marching round, the blowing of the trumpet, and the shout of the men? Because so it pleased him to do. They had no reason for doing what he commanded, only that it was commanded. They could not see that it could do any good. On the first day they marched round once. In the evening there stood the wall, apparently as invulnerable as ever! On the second day they went round again--no sign of the wall giving way. Thus they continued to go round day after day, till they had gone round seven times. There stood the wall, as formidable as ever. On the seventh day they started and completed the seven rounds. Not a break in the wall yet! All they had done did not appear to do any good. This was trying faith! Two items in the programme are lacking, and they certainly appear as much like

nonessentials as anything the Lord ever commanded. Yet, if they are left off, all that has been done will be lost. No matter if they have marched round many times, and done it all right, if they stop now they will not receive the promised benefit.

The command is given to blow the trumpet. The [146] trumpet is blown; but the wall moves not. Only one item remains in all the items commanded, and that was for the men to shout. All eyes are turned to the wall, not believing that the shouts would bring it down, but that God would bring it down. The men shouted; the wall fell, and Jericho was made an easy prey. No man gave the glory to the marching round the wall, to the blast of the trumpet, or the shout of the men-, for all knew that these did not overthrow those strong walls--but the glory was given to the God of Israel, who is mighty in battle, and whose strong arm gave them the victory.

In all these transactions there is reason for following the instruction of the God of Israel, in full confidence that whatever he promises he will most certainly perform. One more positive institution will be sufficient, and will end the present discourse. To find one without delay, and in the shortest possible time, turn to Mark xvi:16: "He that believeth, and is immersed, shall be saved." "Saved," here, is saved from sins, or pardoned. But no man can see any power in immersing a man in water to save his soul from sins. Immersing the body in water certainly can not cleanse the soul from sin. There is no efficacy in water to take away sin; no virtue, or power, of any sort in it to cleanse from sin, either soul or body. All men can see satisfactorily that immersing a man in water can not take away sin. It is not going too far to say that the Lord designed that all men should be able to see that there is no [147] virtue in the things commanded, either the faith or the baptism, to take away sins. It is as certain that believing can not take away sin, as that immersion can not, and it is equally as certain that the two together can not take away sins, as that either one alone can not.

Why, then, must a man believe and be immersed? Man may see why he must believe, as the belief changes the heart, and prepares him in heart for pardon. But then, the belief can not take away sin, any more than the immersion. But who can see why any man should be immersed? No man can see that it can do any man good, in a religious, or a spiritual sense, to immerse him. What, then, is there to impel a man to be immersed? Nothing to the rationalist. He can see nothing in it, in itself, to lead him to be immersed. Indeed, he can see pretty clearly that there is nothing in it, in itself, for soul or body; that, in itself, it can have no tendency to produce or bring what the sinner is seeking--the salvation of his soul, or the remission of sins. Yet there stand the words of the Great Teacher: "He that believeth, and is immersed shall be saved." There is the promise, the other side of baptism--"Shall be saved." Does the sinner desire what is promised? If he does, there lies before him the commandment, "Be baptized." Why must the sinner be immersed? Not because he can see any virtue in water, immersing a man in water, or in all of it together; but because the supreme and absolute authority has [148] appointed it as the initiatory rite of the new institution; has ordained that men and women shall be "immersed into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;" that they shall "believe and be immersed," in order to come to the promise, "shall be saved;" that they shall "repent, and be immersed, every one of them, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins;" that "so many of us as have been immersed into Jesus Christ have put on Christ;" that all shall be "immersed into one body;" that, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God."

There is but one institution in the law of God that has "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" connected with it. That is the one immersion "into the one body." In this institution, in one formal and voluntary act, the believing penitent accepts the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy

Spirit; accepts and enters the new institution; the new and better covenant, upon better promises; formally and voluntarily yields himself to Christ as his new Sovereign. Baptism is the test of his belief in Christ--the trial of his loyalty to the King. Here, at the entrance of the kingdom, the question comes before him of obedience in a matter of the most trying nature--obedience to a commandment, where he can see no reason for the obedience, only that the King requires it. If he stops at the first formal act required of him, and [149] refuses to obey, what may we expect of him at any subsequent time? If the very appointment intended to test his loyalty, try his faith, and develop the spirit of obedience in him, shall be set aside by him, what ground have we for expecting obedience of him in the future?

In this view of it, any one can see the wisdom of God in placing such an appointment as immersion at the entrance into the new covenant. In the first place, he can not see that the thing commanded, in itself, can do any good to soul or body. In the second place, he can see pretty clearly that the thing commanded can not, in itself, do any good, in any philosophical way, to soul or body. In the third place, it appears as if it might do the body injury. Then, it is humiliating to the last degree. Still further, as any one can see, the Lord could save a sinner without it as well as with it. Why, then, must it be done? The wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth require it. The absolute authority commands it. Shall this authority control? or shall poor mortal man decide that it is not essential?

Here is the issue, between the supreme authority which commands it and the human will. Either the supreme authority must be set aside, or the human will must submit. The issue has the salvation of the sinner in it. God has sent Christ crucified to the sinner, with salvation for him; he has graciously sent him the gospel of salvation, proposing [150] repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ; he has ordained one positive institution, in which he offers the sinner Christ, his blood, his grace, remission of sins, the impartation of the Holy Spirit, and the hope of everlasting life. Will the sinner come to this institution, in faith, penitence and love, and receive all this in submitting to the appointment of God; in obeying this commandment? If he will, he can thus yield himself to become a servant of God, and have the assurance of the promise of God, confirmed by an oath, of acceptance with God. As he yields he can in heart say, "Here, Lord, I give myself away; 'tis all that I can do." He may then sing such words as: "Through floods and flames, if Jesus lead, I'll follow where he goes." Rising from this obedience, he can sing, "How happy are they who their Saviour obey."

How noble it is to thus acquiesce in the divine will; to let our will be swallowed up in the will of God! Then, when the soul is in the "spirit of obedience," and in a condition to inquire in the word of the Lord, for instruction, it is easy to find the right way and walk in it. May we, in humility, love, and submission to our Heavenly King, find and walk in the right way of the Lord, and finally be brought to the enjoyment of his everlasting kingdom! [151]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/benjamin-franklin/positive-divine-law/>

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