

The Good Practitioner

by Thomas Watson

The sermon emphasizes that it is not knowledge of the points of religion, but the practice of them, which makes a man truly happy.

Scripture: Romans 6:17

Topics: "Obedience To God", "Christian Living"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the importance of obedience to God, emphasizing that true happiness and blessings come from not just knowing God's commandments, but from actively practicing them. He explains that knowledge alone, without practice, cannot save or bring eternal happiness, as it does not transform the heart or lead to obedience. Watson highlights the necessity of humility, faith, and perseverance in obedience, and the sinfulness of disobedience against God. He urges Christians to be practitioners of religion, offering divine motives and benefits of obedience, including temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings.

Transcript

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"If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." John 13:17

In this chapter our blessed Savior, the great Instructor of the church, falls upon teaching His disciples. He taught them:

1. By doctrine. Verse 34, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another." Christ was now going out of the world; and as a father, when he is dying, leaves a charge with his children that they love one another, so our Savior leaves this solemn charge with His disciples--that they love one another.
2. He taught them by allegory. Verse 4, "He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist." He thus taught them by a sacred allegory how He wrapped Himself with our flesh. The blessed angels stood wondering at how the divine nature could be girded with the human nature.

3. He taught them by example. Verse 5, "After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him." He taught them humility by His own example. He stooped to the lowest office. "He washes His disciples feet", and this He did for their imitation. Verse 14, "you ought also to wash one another's feet." Now our Lord Christ, having thus taught His disciples by doctrine, allegory, and example--made use of all in the words of the text, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them."

This is a text that deserves to be engraved in letters of gold upon our hearts; a text, that, if well observed, will help us to reap benefit by all other texts. A sermon is never rightly heard--until it is practiced. I shall, therefore, make this sermon to be, by the blessing of God, as a stopcock, to keep the rest of the sermons you hear from leaking out. That would be a wonderful sermon, which would help you to put all the other sermons you have heard into practice.

"If you know these things." By the words "these things," our Savior, gathers together all the matters of true religion; though more particularly those two things He has been immediately before speaking of--love and humility. In the text there is:

1. A supposition, "if you know these things and do them."
2. A benediction, "happy are you."

From these two points, we see this doctrine: It is not knowledge of the points of religion--but the practice of them, which makes a man truly happy. Had Christ said, "If you know these things--happy are you," and there had stopped and gone no further, we would have thought that knowledge would be enough to make one eternally happy and blessed. Christ does not stop here, however--but goes further: "happy are you if you do them." Christ does not put happiness upon knowing--but doing. It is not knowledge--but practice, which renders a man truly happy and blessed.

This proposition consists of two branches, and I shall handle them distinctly.

I. Knowledge alone, in the truths of Scripture--will not make a man eternally happy and blessed. Matthew 7:21. Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say?" It is not the mere knowledge and acceptance of the most glorious Gospel truths--which will bring a man to heaven. If a man could fluently discourse on all Scriptural truths, if his head were a treasury of wisdom, an ocean of learning--yet this could not entitle him to happiness. His knowledge might make him admired--but not blessed. If a man knew and believed all the doctrines of Scripture--this could not crown him with happiness.

Indeed, knowledge of the doctrines of Scripture, has a beauty in it next to the pearl of grace; this gold is most precious. Knowledge is the enriching of the mind. It is a fair garland to look upon--but it is like Rachael. Though she was beautiful--yet being barren she said, "Give me children or I die!" Just so, if knowledge does not bring forth the child of obedience--it will die and come to nothing.

I would by no means disparage knowledge. Knowledge is the pilot to guide us in our obedience. If zeal is not according to knowledge, it is will-worship; it is setting up an altar to an unknown God. Knowledge must usher in obedience. It is as abominable to God to offer up the blind as the lame. Final ignorance damns! Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." The Hebrew word is they are cut down or felled like trees. So there is a necessity of knowledge. Knowledge is the elder sister--but obedience is

better than knowledge; here the elder must serve the younger. Knowledge may put us into the way of happiness, but it is only practice which brings us there. That knowledge alone cannot make a man eternally happy and blessed--I shall prove by three demonstrations:

1. Knowledge alone, does not make a man better; therefore, it cannot make him eternally happy and blessed. Bare knowledge has no influence; it does not leave a spiritual tincture of holiness behind. Knowledge informs--not transforms. Knowledge, of itself, has no power upon the heart to make it more divine. Bare knowledge is like weak medicine, which does not work. It does not warm the affections or purge the conscience; it does not fetch virtue from Christ to dry up the bloody issue of sin. A man may receive the light of the truth--yet not love the truth, "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." 2 Thessalonians 2:10. The Apostle calls it "a form of knowledge," Romans 2:20. Knowledge alone, is but a dead form, having nothing to animate it. He who has knowledge alone--is a spiritual stillborn! He looks like a Christian--but has neither appetite nor motion. Knowledge alone, makes men monsters in religion--they are all head but no feet! They do not walk in Christ, Colossians 2:6.

A man may have right knowledge--and be neglectful of his duty. Plutarch said of the Grecians that they knew what was just--but did not practice justice. A man may have Scriptural knowledge--and still be profane! He may have a clear head and a foul heart! The understanding may be illumined--when the foot treads in unholy paths. If knowledge is divorced from practice, and does not make a man better--then it cannot make a man eternally happy and blessed.

2. Knowledge alone, will not save; therefore, it cannot make him eternally happy and blessed. If bare knowledge will save--then all who have knowledge shall be saved. But that is not true--for then Judas would be saved--for he had knowledge enough. Then the devil would be saved! A man may have right knowledge, and be no better than a devil! Hell is full of learned heads! Now, if knowledge alone will not save--then it will not put a man into a state of blessedness.

3. Knowledge alone, makes a man's case worse; therefore, it cannot make him eternally happy and blessed. Knowledge takes away all excuse and apology. John 15:22, "Now you have no cloak for your sin." Knowledge adds to a man's torment. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you!" It will be better with heathen--than with professing Christians living in a contradiction to their knowledge. Luke 12:47, "The servant will be severely punished, for though he knew his duty, he refused to do it!" Knowledge without practice, serves only as a torch to light men to hell--the brighter the light, the hotter the fire! If a king causes his proclamation to be published, and the subject knows it, but disobeys it--this incenses the king all the more against him. He will punish that man for malicious contempt. Better to be ignorant of Scriptural truth--than knowingly disobedient to it. Now, then, if knowledge alone makes a man's case worse--then it is far from making him eternally happy and blessed.

USE. Get Scriptural knowledge--but do not rest in it. Will you rest in that which will not make you eternally happy and blessed? In this sense, "he who increases knowledge, increases sorrow," Ecclesiastes 1:18. His knowledge will only serve to condemn him. If knowledge separated from practice would make men eternally happy and blessed, the people of England would be a happy people. They do not lack knowledge. Never since the time of the Apostles, did Biblical light shine clearer; but here is the problem: most people know--only to know. It may be said of the generality of people, as Seneca speaks--they would rather dispute well than live well. They would have knowledge to bespangle them--rather than sanctify them. Alas, knowledge alone will never make them eternally happy and blessed. Men may build their

nest among the stars--yet make their bed in hell. They may have knowledge to crown them--and God to damn them. O professor, who glories in your bare head knowledge--in what do you excel a hypocrite? Where do you excel the devil? He knows all the articles of the creed. He could say to Christ "It is written." Is it not sad, that a man should have no better evidences to show for heaven, than the devil!

How unprofitable is a plethora of head knowledge? He who is only filled with knowledge, is like a glass filled with froth. What a vain, foolish thing it is, to have knowledge and make no spiritual use of it! It is as if a man had several fountains in his garden, but never watered his flowers with them; or as if an donkey should be laden with hay but eats none of it. Just so, many a man carries a great deal of knowledge about him--but does not feed upon the sweetness of it nor digests his knowledge into practice.

To know only to know--is like one who knows certain countries by the map and can discourse of them--but has never traveled into them nor tasted the sweet spices of those countries. Just so, the gnostic in religion has heard and read much of the beauty of holiness--but has never traveled into piety or tasted how good the Lord is. What profit is it--to have the Bible in our heads--but not in our hearts? Can mere notions be cordials when we come to die?

To conclude this, men cannot properly be called Christians from their knowledge alone. You do not call him a craftsman who does not work in his trade. Let a man be ever so knowledgeable--yet you do not call him a goldsmith who has never refined a vessel or tried gold. Though a man has knowledge in surgery--yet you do not call him a surgeon who has never lanced a wound or dressed a sore. Just so, it is improper to call him a Christian who has knowledge, but no practice. He knows he should mortify sin--but he does not. He knows he should show works of mercy--but he does not. He never yet wrought in the trade of godliness.

II. I proceed to the second branch of the doctrine--that it is the practice of true religion, which makes a man eternally happy and blessed. Knowledge without practice is like a fair arbor without fruit. The art of practice is the most noble art. The life-blood of religion runs through the veins of obedience. Here I shall show why there must be practice, and that it is only the practical part of religion which makes a man eternally happy and blessed.

1. The reason there must be practice, is because it is only practice which answers God's end in giving us His Word, both written and preached. Leviticus 18:4, "You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees." Deuteronomy 26:16, "The Lord your God is commanding you this day to follow these statutes and ordinances. You must be careful to follow them with all your heart and all your soul." Not only shall you know them, but follow them. The Word of God is not only a rule of knowledge, but a rule of duty. If you speak to your children and tell them what your mind is on a matter, it is not only that they may know your mind--but do it. God gives us His Word not only as a picture to look upon--but as a copy to write after. The master gives his servant a candle not to gaze on--but to work by.

The light of Scripture is to guide our feet into the way of obedience; and so David calls the Word of God not a lamp to his eyes but a "lamp to his feet," Psalm 119:105, implying that the light of the Word is rather to walk by--than to see by. God gives us His Word as His will and testament, which He leaves in charge with us to see it performed. If God would only have had His laws to be known or talked of, He might have delivered them to parrots! If He would only have had them kept safe, He might have "engraved them with an iron pen, and laid in the rock forever," Job 19:24. But, therefore, He delivers the records of heaven to men that they should be obeyed.

The Lord gives us His precepts as a physician gives the patient his prescriptions--to take and apply. For this end are all God's institutes, that we may, by practice, apply them for the purging out of sin and bringing the soul into a more healthful temper. God gives us His Word as the mother gives the child the breast--not only to look upon, but to draw from. Many have gone to hell with the breast in their mouths, because they have not drawn it and turned the milk of the Word into sacred nourishment!

2. It is only the practical part of religion, which makes a man eternally happy and blessed. This is clear if we consult either with Scripture or reason.

It appears by Scripture. The Scripture knows no other way to happiness, but by practice. Psalm 15:5, "He who does these things shall never be moved." The Psalmist does not say, he who knows these things shall never perish--but he who does them. To be a doer of the Word entitles a man to blessedness. James 1:25, "But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who acts--this person will be blessed in what he does." Not for his deed, as the Papist's wrongly gloss--but in his deed. Obedience is rather an evidence of blessedness, than a cause of blessedness.

Search from one end of the Bible to the other--and you shall find the crown still set upon the head of obedience! The renowned saints of old have always received their commendations and titles of honor from their obedience. "Moses was a man mighty in words and deeds," Acts 7:22. When Christ pronounced the sentence of absolution, see how it ran, "Then the King will say to those on His right--Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me." Matthew 25:34-36. Christ is not said at the last day to reward men according to their knowledge but their deeds. "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to repay each person according to what he has done" Revelation 22:12. So, then, if the Scripture, that unfailing measuring rod, points out no other way to happiness but practice--then it is vain to expect it any other way.

This appears by reason. Happiness is not attainable, but in the use of means. Now, the use of means implies practice. Salvation must not only be sought out by knowledge, but wrought out by practice, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Philippians 2:12. There can be no crown without running, no recompense without diligence. If happiness comes only in the use of means--then it is neither imaginable or feasible without practice.

If it is only the doing part of religion, which makes men eternally happy and blessed--then it sharply reproves those who know much--yet do nothing. They talk of God--but do not walk with God. Men are all for knowledge, because it is counted an ornament. They would be adorned with this mirthful flower--but one leaf of the tree of life is worth all the tree of knowledge. It is better to practice one truth, than to know all truths. Herein most Christians are defective; they have with Rachael, good eyes but--they are barren. Mephibosheth fell and became lame in his feet, 2 Samuel 4:4. Just so, since Adam's fall, men are lame in their feet. They do not walk in the ways of obedience.

Men know that covetousness is a sin. The Greek word for covetousness signifies an immoderate desire of getting, like Midas who desired that everything he touched might be turned to gold. The several species of sin grow upon this root of covetousness, 2 Timothy 3:2. Yet men live in this sin, and nothing can cure them of this cancer of covetousness. Amos 2:7, "They pant after the dust of the earth." Men know swearing is a

sin; for this the land mourns, Jeremiah 23:10. Sinners let their oaths fly, and God sends a flying scroll against them, Zachariah 5:2-3--yet they will not leave this sin. They know drunkenness to be a sin. There is death in the cup--yet the drunkard will drink if off! Men know immorality to be a sin, Exodus 20:14; it wastes their strength, blots their name, wounds their conscience, wrongs their posterity, and damns their souls! Revelation 22:15. Yet they will follow this sin and burn in lust--though they burn in hell.

Men know they should be winged with activity, in the duties of piety--but they can be content to let these duties alone. They know they should mortify the flesh, pray in their families, be just in their dealing, and give alms to the poor. But if there were no other Bible to teach us these things than the lives of most, we would not know there were any such duties commanded! For the most part, men are not changed. What they were twenty or thirty years ago--they are the same still--as proud and unreformed as ever. The best tools have been either broken or worn out upon their rocky hearts--yet they are as unhewn and unpolished as ever. The bellows are burnt, the lungs of God's ministers are wasted--yet how much reprobate silver remains still in many of our congregations! If none are eternally happy and blessed but doers of the Word--how few will be saved!

WHY do so few come up to the practical part of religion? Surely it is:

1. Lack of practice, is for lack of deep HUMILITY. He who has the spirit of bondage let loose upon him apprehends himself, as it were, in the forlorn-hope. He sees the sea of his sins before him ready to swallow him up, and the justice of God behind pursuing and ready to overtake him! He cries out as Paul, Acts 9:6, "Lord, what will You have me do? Will You have me repent, or believe? I stand ready pressed to whatever service You command." The humbled sinner does not dispute--but obeys. The seed that did not have depth of earth, withered and came to nothing, Matthew 13:5-6. The reason men do not bring forth the fruits of obedience, is because they have no depth of earth. They were never yet deeply humbled for sin. A proud man will never obey. Instead of trampling his sins under his feet--he tramples God's laws under his feet, Jeremiah 43:3-4. He who stoops in humility is the likeliest to put his neck under Christ's yoke. He who sees himself within an inch of hell, asks the jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:30. What will a condemned man not do, for a pardon!

2. Lack of practice, is for lack of FAITH. Isaiah 53:1, "Who has believed our report?" This makes sermons to be like showers of rain, falling upon a rock! They neither mollify nor fructify, because men are in part, infidels. They would rather dispute than believe. Such as live as skeptics--die as atheists. If men really believed that sin was so bitter, and that wrath and hell followed it--would they take this serpent into their bosom! If they really believed that there was a beauty in holiness, if they believed that godliness was gain, that there was joy in the way and heaven at the end--would they not turn their feet into Christ's way? Men have some slight transient thoughts of these things--but their minds are not fully convinced, nor their conscience fully captivated into the belief of them. This is Satan's masterpiece, his net by which he drags millions to hell, by keeping them in unbelief. He knows that if he can only keep them from the belief of the truth--he is sure to keep them from the practice of it.

3. Men's backwardness to practice, is from the DIFFICULTY of the practical part of religion. It is easy to hear a truth, to give some assent, to commend it, to make a profession of it. But to digest a truth into practice is hard--because men are overgrown with sloth! They are loathe to put themselves to too much trouble, "Laziness brings on deep sleep." Proverbs 19:15. Can men dig for gold--and not for the pearl of great price! Can they take pains in the pursuing of their sins--and will they be at no pains for the saving of their souls! I dare be bold to say, it costs many a sinner more sweat and labor in toiling for his lusts--than it

costs a saint in serving his God!

4. Lack of practice, is because the WORLD comes between and hinders. The thorns choke the seed of the Word. Men practice so much in the world--that they have no time to practice better things! The world is like a loud mill--it makes such a noise in carnal hearts, that it drowns the sound of God's silver trumpet. Men's affections are sometimes kindled by the preaching of the Word, and we begin to hope that the flame of godliness will break forth in their lives; but then comes the earth--and puts out this fire! How many sermons lie buried in earthly hearts!

Oh, that the lack of practice in this age, were more laid to heart! This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation: many professors are all ears. If we should see a creature made up of nothing but ears, it would be a monster in nature! How many such monsters are there in our churches? They hear and hear--and are never the better! Like the salamander which lies in the fire, but, as naturalists say, it is never the hotter.

Some satisfy themselves with having ordinances. Judges 17:13, "Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite as my priest." But what is medicine--if it is not applied? What is it to have the sound of the Word in our ears--unless we have the Savior of it in our hearts? It will be little comfort to men on their deathbeds, to think that Christ has been preached in their streets, and they have been lifted up to heaven in Gospel administrations, when their consciences shall tell them they have been unholy and unreformed. They have come into God's house as the beasts did into the ark: they came in unclean, and went out of the ark unclean.

This exhorts all to become practitioners in religion. There are three steps leading to heaven: knowledge, assent, and practice. It is not taking the two first steps--but the third step which will make you eternally happy and blessed. Obedience is the grand precept both of the law and gospel. In this stands a Christian's duty, in this consists his felicity. 1 Samuel 15:22, "To obey is better than sacrifice." It is grateful to God, and graceful to a Christian.

What is the excellency of a thing--but its practicalness and usefulness? What are the fine feathers of a bird if it cannot sing? What is a plant, though decked with leaves, if it brings forth no fruit? What is it we commend in a horse, his eyes or his good spirit? Song of Solomon 5:5, "My hands dropped with myrrh." Not only must a Christian's lips drop knowledge--but his hands and his fingers must drop myrrh, that is, by working the works of obedience.

Let me use some divine MOTIVES to entice Christians to the practical part of godliness:

1. Gospel-obedience is an evidence of sincerity. As our Savior Christ said in another sense, John 10:25, "The works which I do, bear witness of Me." Though no man ever spoke like Christ--yet when he comes to put himself upon a trial, he will not be judged by his words-- but by his works. "They bear witness of Me." Just so, it is not a Christian's golden words--but his works which testify of him. Psalm 119:59, "I have turned my feet unto Your statutes." David not only turned his ears to God's testimonies, but he turned his feet to them--he walked in them. We do not judge the health of a man, by his high color--but by the pulse of the arm where the blood chiefly operates. Just so, we do not judge a Christian's soundness by his knowledge or high expressions. What is this but high color? Saul may be among the prophets--but the estimate of a Christian is to be taken by his obediential actings towards God.

2. To be practitioners in religion will not only do yourselves good, but others as well. This will both honor religion and propagate it.

It will honor religion. The gospel may be compared to a beautiful queen. The fruitful lives of professors are so many jewels, which adorn this queen and make her shine forth in greater glory and magnificence. What a honor it was to godliness, when the Apostle could say that the faith of the Romans was trumpeted abroad in every place! Romans 1:8, "I thank my God that your faith is spoken of through the whole world." That is, faith flourishing into obedience. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, "We give thanks to God for you, remembering your work of faith, and labor of love." Christians should be ambitious to keep up the credit of religion.

The practice of those truths we know, will greatly propagate religion. Practice is the best argument we can use, to prevail with others. This will confirm them in the truth of religion. The emperor Jovinian said to the Christians, "I cannot judge your doctrine--but I can judge your lives." Their practice would preach loudest. If others see us make a profession, and yet live in a contradiction to what we profess; if they hear Jacob's voice but see Esau's hands--they will think religion is but a devout sham. Why does the father forbid his children to swear--when he himself swears? Would you gain many proselytes to religion? Be doers of the Word. Say as Abimilech said to his fellows, "What you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done." Judges 9:48. Would you be as magnets to draw your children and servants to heaven? Set upon the practice of holiness. Basil observes that the Christian religion greatly flourished by the sanctity and liberality of those who professed it.

3. Thus we show our love to Christ. John 14:21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them--he it is that loves Me." We used to say, "If you love me, do such a thing." This should be a great argument to obedience. By the love you bear to Jesus Christ--obey His Word. Every man would be thought to love Christ, yes, but try your love by this test--are you cast into a Gospel mold? Do you obey? It is a vain thing for a man to say he loves Christ's person--when he slights His commands.

4. Without practice you will come short of those who have come short of heaven. "Herod did many things," Mark 6:20. He was, in many things, a practicer of John's ministry. Those who rest in the speculative part of religion, are not as good as Herod.

5. What unspeakable comfort will obedience yield both in life, and death!

In life. Is it not a comfort to a man when he has been casting up his accounts--to find that he has gained in his trade? You come here in the use of ordinances, the Word and prayer, to trade for heaven. Now, if you find upon a true account that you have gained in the trade of godliness and are filled with the fruits of the Spirit--will not this be a great comfort to you? He who is full of good works, God will gather the fruit and bless the tree!

In death. Obedience gives comfort at death. What a joy was it to Paul, when he came to die, that he could make that sweet appeal, 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have kept the faith!" That is, Paul had kept the doctrine of faith--and had lived the life of faith. Oh, what a comfort for a Christian to lay his life down--when he has laid his life out in the service of God! This was a deathbed cordial to king Hezekiah. Isaiah 38:3, "Remember, O Lord, I beseech You how I have walked before You in truth." A man may repent of his fruitless knowledge--but never did any man repent of his obedience when he came to die! Never did any Christian who is going to rest with God, repent that he had walked with God.

6. What is the end of all God's administrations, but obedience? What are all God's promises, but persuasions to obedience? What is the end of all God's threatenings, which stand as the angel with a flaming sword in his hand--but to drive us to obedience! Deuteronomy 11:28, "A curse if you will not obey." What is the voice of mercy, but to call us to duty? The father gives his child money to entice him to obedience. The fire of God's mercies, is to make the sweet water of obedience distill from us. "Mercy," as Ambrose said, "is a medicine which God applies to us to cure our barrenness." What are all the examples of God's justice upon others--but alarms to awaken us out of the bed of sloth and put us into a posture of service? God's rod upon others, is a stick to point us to obedience. If God does not have His end in respect of duty--we cannot have our end in respect of glory.

7. Consider what a sin disobedience is! Jeremiah 44:16 is a sad Scripture, "As for the word you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord--we will not do."

1. Disobedience is a sin against reason. Are we able to stand it out, in defiance against God? 1 Corinthians 10:22, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?" It is as if the thorns should set themselves in battle array against the fire! Will the sinner go to measure arms with the great God! What Solomon said of laughter, Ecclesiastes 2:2, the same may he said of rebellion, "it is mad."

2. Disobedience is a sin against equity. We have our subsistence from God, "in Him we live and move, and have our being." Is it not just and fitting that, as we live upon Him, we should live to Him? Is it not just and fitting that, as God gives us our allowance, we should give Him our allegiance? If the general gives his soldier pay, the soldier is to march at his command, by the law of equity.

3. Disobedience is a sin against conscience. God, by creation, is our Father, so that conscience binds to duty. Malachi 1:6, "If then I am a Father--where is My honor?"

4. Disobedience is a sin against our vows. We have taken the oath of allegiance, "Your vows are upon me O God," Psalm 65:12. We have many vows upon us--our baptismal vow, our sacramental, our national, and our sickbed vows. Here are four cords to draw us to obedience, and if we slip these sacred knots and cast these cords from us, will not God come upon us for perjury! If our oaths will not bind us--God has chains that will!

5. Disobedience is a sin against our prayers. We pray, "May Your will be done." So that, by non-obedience, we confute ourselves and live in a contradiction to our own prayers. That man who is self-confuted, is self-condemned.

6. Disobedience is a sin against God's kindness. It is a great sin; it is a kicking against God's love, a despising the riches of His goodness, Romans 2:4. Therefore, the Apostle links these two sins together, 2 Timothy 3:2, disobedience and unthankfulness; and this dyes a sin a crimson color. One calls ingratitude, the seminary of all sin. It is an epitomizing sin. Brutus' unkindness went deeper to Caesar's heart, than the stab.

7. Disobedience is a sin against nature. Every creature in its kind obeys God. Animate creatures obey Him. God spoke to the fish to set Jonah ashore, and it did it immediately, Jonah 2:10. What are the birds' thankful hymns, as Ambrose calls them--but tributes of obedience?

Inanimate creatures obey God. "The stars in their course fought against Sisera," Judges 5. "The wind and the sea obey Him," Mark 4:41. The very stones, if God gives them a commission, will cry out against the

sins of men. Habakkuk 2:11, "The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." If men would be silent--the stones would, in some manner, have testified of Christ, Luke 19:40. At Christ's passion the rocks rent, Matthew 27:51; which tearing rhetoric was a voice to tell the world that the Messiah was now crucified. Shall every creature obey God--but man? Oh, man, think thus with yourself: "If God had made me a stone, I would have obeyed Him; and now that He has made me rational being, shall I refuse to obey?" This is against nature. There are none who disobey God--but man and the devil. Can we find none to join with, but the devil?

8. Disobedience is a sin against self-preservation. Disloyalty is treason, and by treason the sinner is bound over to the wrath of God. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction." He who refuses 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!

Thus you have seen the sin of disobedience set out in its bloody colors. "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son," Kiss Christ with a kiss of love; Kiss Him with a kiss of loyalty. "lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment!" Psalm 2:10-12.

8. Another motive, is the benefit of obedience. Psalm 19:11, "In keeping His precepts there is great reward." Obedience is crowned with happiness! So the text says, "happy are you." If this argument will not prevail, what will?

QUESTION. But what happiness are you speaking of?

ANSWER. All kinds of blessings are poured upon the head of obedience, as the precious oil was poured on Aaron's head.

1. Temporal blessings. "You will experience all these blessings if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in your towns and in the country. You will be blessed with many children and productive fields. You will be blessed with fertile herds and flocks. You will be blessed with baskets overflowing with fruit, and with kneading bowls filled with bread. You will be blessed wherever you go, both in coming and in going. If you obey the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways, the Lord will establish you as his holy people as he solemnly promised to do." Deuteronomy 28:2-6, 9. He who has a fruitful heart--shall have a fruitful crop. God will make him to thrive in his estate; and his basket shall not only be full, but blessed. God will bless what he has. Here is not only the sack full of corn--but money in the mouth of the sack.

2. Spiritual blessings. Exodus 19:5, "If you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the nations of the earth." You shall be My portion, My jewels, the apple of My eye. I will give kingdoms for your ransom. Jeremiah 7:23, "Obey, and I will be your God." I will make over Myself to you by a deed of gift. What a superlative sovereign mercy is this! Psalm 14:4, "Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord."

3. Eternal blessings. Hebrews 5:9, "Christ became the author of eternal salvation, to all who obey Him. Oh, then, who would not be in love with obedience!" While we please God--we pleasure ourselves. You see, brethren, you are no losers by obedience.

I shall lay down some rules to help Christians in their obedience, that it may be the sacrifice of a sweet smelling savor to God. Obedience must have these four ingredients in it:

1. Obedience must be CORDIAL. Deuteronomy 26:16, "The Lord your God is commanding you this day to follow these statutes and ordinances. You must be careful to follow them with all your heart and all your soul." Romans 6:17, "You have obeyed from the heart." Obedience without the heart, is like fire on the altar without incense. The heart is the mainspring of love, and it is love which perfumes every duty. The heart makes service a freewill offering--or else it is but a dead duty. Cain brought his sacrifice, not his heart. Obedience without the heart is hypocrisy! "How can you say 'I love You', when your heart is not with Me?" Judges 16:15.

2. Obedience must be EXTENSIVE. It must reach to all God's commandments, 1 Kings 9:4, Luke 1:6.

QUESTION. But who can arrive at this?

ANSWER. Though we cannot keep all God's commandments legally--yet we may evangelically:

A true Christian consents to the equity of the whole law. Romans 7:12, "The law is holy, and just, and good." He sets his seal to every law.

A true Christian makes conscience of every law. David had respect to all God's commandments, Psalm 119:6; his eye was upon all. Every command has such authority upon a Christian, that he does not know how to dispense with it. Though he fails in every duty--yet he dares not neglect any duty.

The child of God desires to keep every command. Psalm 119:5, "Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!" What a child of God lacks in strength--he makes up in will. Romans 7:18, "To will is present." The regenerate will remains bent to all God's precepts.

The gracious soul mourns that he can do no better. When he fails--he weeps. "O wretched man that I am!" Romans 7:24. "Oh, this unbelieving heart! How am I clogged with corruption!" Thus, a child of God laments his failings, and judges himself for them, and this is, in a Gospel sense, to keep every law.

Unsound hearts, as they are slight in their obedience--so they are partial in their obedience. Some duties they will dispense with; some sins they will indulge. "May the Lord pardon me in this one thing," 2 Kings 5:18. The hypocrite will walk in some of God's statutes, not in all. He is like a lame horse, which will not set all his feet upon the ground--but favors one leg. There are lame Christians who halt and limp and favor themselves in some things, though it is to the hazard of their souls. Herod would just as soon die--as leave his incest. But true obedience is universal. We owe to our God unlimited obedience.

3. The third ingredient into obedience is FAITH. Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" therefore, it is called the obedience of faith, Romans 16:26. Abel, by faith, is said to offer up a better sacrifice than Cain. Faith is a vital principle; without faith all our services are dead. Therefore, the Scripture speaks of dead works, Hebrews 6:1.

QUESTION. But why must this silver thread of faith run through the whole work of obedience?

ANSWER. Because faith looks at Christ in every duty, and so both the person and offering are accepted. Ephesians 1:6, "He has accepted us in the beloved." We are not accepted through our duties--but through the Beloved. Faith looks at the merit of Christ to take away the guilt, and the Spirit of Christ to take away

the filth which cleaves to the most angelic services. Thus it procures acceptance.

Nay, faith not only looks at Christ--but it unites to Christ. Believers are part of Christ. Christ and the saints make one body. No wonder--then if God casts a favorable aspect upon those services which believers present to Him.

4. Obedience must be CONSTANT. Revelation 2:26, "He who keeps My works unto the end--to Him will I give the morning star." Faith must lead the caravan and perseverance must bring up the rear.

There is something still remaining for a Christian to do--and he must not leave work until the night of death comes on. "An old disciple," Acts 21:16. What an honor is it for one to be gray-headed in piety. What a credit when it shall be said of him, "His last works are better than his first!" Revelation 2:19. A good Christian is like wine full of spirits which is good to the last drop. An artist makes his last work more complete and skillful. Blessed is that man who, the nearer he is to death--moves swifter towards heaven!

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