

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

doubt that under the Judges, and in the days of the more unprincipled of the kings, the people at large knew but little of the provisions of the Law of Moses, and that even a large proportion of the priests had but a slight acquaintance with its contents.

J. J. LIAS.

ART. II.—THE SERVANT OF CHRIST.

NO. V.—OBEDIENCE.

ONE of the most beautiful and Divine characteristics of our Lord's human nature was His submission to the will of His Father. When His bodily appetite was craving for food in the desert after His long fast, and the tempter was urging Him to turn the stones into bread, He chose to trust rather to the Almighty Power which was with Him and in Him, and to reply that obedience to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God was the true life. When He was preaching to the Jews, He avoided every topic and opportunity of asserting Himself; He repeatedly assured them that "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; for whatsoever things He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." "I can of Mine own self do nothing." "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." "I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." When He was in the garden on the fatal night, in the agony of making up His mind to go forward and die, and His whole body and soul shrank from the horror of what was about to befall Him, and He cried, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," He immediately ended, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." He obeyed the call of the Baptist, and was plunged in the Jordan: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." He knew that as the Son of God He was Lord of the Sabbath, yet He punctually and faithfully kept all the feasts and ceremonies of the Law of Moses. He knew that as the Messiah it was not His business to recognise the taxes of the Romans, yet He took special means to provide the tribute at the proper time. In all things He was obedient, and restrained Himself from the exercise of self-will. He was obedient to His Heavenly Father, obedient to His mother and her husband, obedient to the Roman Emperor, obedient to the Law of Moses, obedient to the Jewish authorities. This is one of the qualities which, after His removal from among them, struck His Apostles most, in

spite of the state of wonder and admiration in which they were placed when they discovered that their companion and Master was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Word made flesh. So St. Paul writes: "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." And again: "Even Christ pleased not Himself." And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered, and being made perfect He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."

Now this spirit of meekness, submissiveness, and obedience which we find to be one of the most remarkable characteristics of the Son of God Himself, is altogether opposed to many of the influences, teachings and ideals of the present day. In these times, when the authority of Christianity is very largely ignored and neglected by many of those who help to make up our public opinion, who utter many of our public speeches, and who write many of our leading articles, the contrary spirit is held up for admiration and example. The spirit of individualism, self-assertion, and self-will is very commonly taught as the first duty of a citizen. A crowd of ignorant persons is urged to insist on occupying a certain public square where their meeting will be offensive to traffic and trade. Peasants are roused to cherish impossible demands for land and imaginary institutions, contrary to the practice and well-being of the country. Politicians who cannot get their own way are determined to make government difficult, if not impossible. Session after session useful measures which are almost completed are reluctantly abandoned, for which large sections of the community are crying out, and which are necessary for healing from time to time the evils of our commonwealth. So common is this spirit of disobedience, and so little is thought of the great Christian virtue of submissiveness, that even in the Church of Christ itself there are clergy who are firmly persuaded that it is their duty to resist authority in matters which to them seem of enormous magnitude, but which to calm and judicious persons appear inconceivably small. These are some of the examples which we have before our own eyes, both in Church and State, of the prevalent most unchristian spirit of insubordination.

The example of our Lord would be enough by itself to condemn our age in all these respects. But we are not even left to apply the principle from that Divine life. In every

conceivable relation the virtue of obedience is set before us. It is not merely, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." It is, "Women are commanded to be under obedience;" "Wives, be in subjection to your own husbands;" "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord." It is, "Servants, obey your masters in all things according to the flesh; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God." It is, "Put them in mind to obey principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers," wrote St. Paul to the Romans, even under the wicked and hateful tyranny of Nero; "for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou, then, not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." And to congregations it is written: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." To the Thessalonians St. Paul writes: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake." To his Corinthian congregation he says: "To this end did I write, that I might know the proof of you whether ye be obedient in all things." Meek, humble, and gentle as St. Paul always is, he is fully aware of the duty of a Christian teacher to expect such attention: "The inward affection of Titus," he writes, "is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him." Above all things, beyond all these earthly relations, it is our one great duty to struggle to cast down imaginations and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

As usual, it is not merely that which at first sight is most popular which is really most truly happy. At the first glance it might be thought that universal self-assertion, absolute independence, the claim of every man to push his own way and achieve his own rights at the cost of everybody else, would be

the most satisfactory. But is it not plain how surely this indulgence would lead to universal injustice, universal discomfort, the triumph of the strong over the weak, unceasing struggles, unceasing violence? "Obedience is our universal duty and destiny," wrote Carlyle, "wherein whoso will not bend must break. Too early and too thoroughly we cannot be trained to know that 'would' in this world of ours is a mere zero to 'should,' and for the most part, as the smallest of fractions, even to 'shall.'" What was it that made that illustrious man of God, John Wesley, so great and true a teacher? He had a no less eminent mother, who taught him the lesson of control. "I insist," said Susanna Wesley, "on conquering the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents till its own understanding comes to maturity, and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind. As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children insures their after-wretchedness and irreligion; whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety. This is still more evident if we farther consider that religion is nothing else than doing the will of God, and not our own; that the one grand impediment to our temporal and eternal happiness being this self-will, no indulgence of it can be trivial, no denial unprofitable; so that the parent who studies to subdue it in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil's work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him is to damn his child soul and body for ever."

One of the acutest observers of human nature who ever lived, the French essayist Montaigne, has guided our thoughts in the same direction. "The first law," he says, "that ever God gave to man was a law of pure obedience; it was a commandment naked and simple, wherein man had nothing to inquire after or to dispute, forasmuch as to obey is the proper office of a rational soul, acknowledging a heavenly superior and benefactor. From obedience and submission sprang all other virtues, as all sin springs from disobedience." There is another weighty saying full of wisdom, which it is well for us to remember, from the pagan philosopher Seneca. He was born rather before our Lord Jesus Christ, so it is a perfectly independent witness. "It is foolish to strive with what we cannot avoid; we are born subjects; and to obey God is perfect liberty. He who does this shall be free, safe, and

quiet; all his actions shall succeed to his wishes." "Some persons think of obedience," says another writer, "as if it were nothing else than slavery and servitude; and so it is if the will be constrained. The man who obeys by compulsion and through fear wears a chain which must gall and fret his spirit." There is the real truth; a cheerful, willing obedience is in reality victory. "One very common error," says Paley, "misleads the opinion of mankind, that universally authority is pleasant, submission painful. In the general course of human affairs the very reverse of this is nearer to the truth: command is anxiety, obedience is ease."

We see, then, that the true beauty and happiness of life consists in recognising true and proper authority, and in working vigorously and harmoniously with it. "By nature," said the sagacious Aristotle, "some command and some obey, that all may enjoy safety." The child begins in obeying the natural authority of his parents, which is the beginning of all morality and religion. The pupil obeys his master, the servant his employer; the more loyally and faithfully he obeys, the happier his life will be. We, as citizens, have delegated our combined authority to the Queen and the Houses of Parliament; we obey their lawful commands with alacrity. Government by irresponsible newspapers we altogether abominate and repudiate. The judges and the magistrates exercise the judicial powers of the realm; we accept their decisions with contentment. The municipal authorities are responsible for our health and comfort, and for our contributions to the expenses of government; we do not dispute or shirk their arrangements. The police are the guardians of public peace and order; we accept their directions implicitly, and are grateful to them for the courage, good temper and fidelity with which they keep such vast masses of us in tolerable harmony with each other. Should we once forget our Christianity, and encourage a general spirit of disputatiousness, turbulence and disobedience, then we make their functions absolutely impossible.

Lastly, as Christians, we bend our wills to the revelation of God. We cannot understand it all. Perhaps we can see but a small part of it. We cannot make it into a scientific system. We cannot reduce it to a matter of sight, because its essence on this side of the grave is to be in the province of faith. But we can see enough to guide our steps through life. We see that what God has revealed squares with the universal laws of right and wrong, which are themselves part of His eternal message. Some things we cannot comprehend: but we say, with that subtle religious thinker who was himself in his way a type of obedience and meekness,

Lead, kindly Light! amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!

We submit to the regulations of the universal Church of Christ. We make our bishops and ministers responsible for the teaching of Scripture, the ordering of the public worship of God, and the charitable relief of the poor; and the more the bishops and their clergy, the ministers and their people, trust each other and work together, so much the more rapid will be the progress of the Kingdom of Christ.

The sum, indeed, of all is that we obey God, and we find His commands in His Word. "Nothing can be love to God which does not shape itself into obedience." "True obedience to God is the obedience of faith and good works; that is, he is truly obedient to God who trusts Him and does what He commands."

I worship Thee, sweet will of God! and all Thy ways adore,
And every day I live I seem to love Thee more and more.
When obstacles and trials seem like prison walls to be,
I do the little I can do, and leave the rest to Thee.
I know not what it is to doubt, my heart is ever gay,
I run no risk, for, come what will, Thou always hast Thy way!
I have no cares, O blessed will, for all my cares are Thine;
I live in triumph, Lord, for Thou hast made Thy triumphs mine.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.

ART. III.—DEAN BURGON.

John William Burgon, late Dean of Chichester. By E. M. GOULBURN, D.D., D.C.L. John Murray.

DR. GOULBURN'S regretted retirement from the Deanery of Norwich has enabled him to fulfil the office of biographer of Dean Burgon with admirable celerity. The work has been a labour of love, although some may think that it is executed on too large a scale. It is a book which will be highly prized by many who admired and loved John William Burgon, and it forms a remarkable addition to the various memoirs which have had the Oxford movement for their theme.

It is well, perhaps, to begin this brief notice by an expression of regret that Dr. Goulburn should have claimed for Burgon a much higher place as a religious teacher than he can be said to possess.

The preface—which contains much bearing on the question of Biblical criticism—is, indeed, written in a strain of panic, and we cannot help thinking that Dr. Goulburn greatly exaggerates the force of the wave of criticism now breaking upon our shores, and is also forgetful that there are many who,