

OBEDIENCE

(The discourse immediately below is by Pastor Russell and entitled “OBEDIENCE” and is found in the 1911 Convention Report, beginning on page 11.)

I will make my address very short, dear friends, and give you time to get back from your suppers. I have in mind a subject that might be appropriate to us for a few moments of consideration. What is it that the Lord specially expects of you and of me? What is the testing matter in God’s sight? We might view the subject from various standpoints, and something might be said from them all, but to my understanding, there is just the one thing that covers all. We might say that God desires us to have a great deal of meekness, a great deal of gentleness, a great deal of patience, a great deal of longsuffering, a great deal of brotherly kindness, and a great deal of love in general. And we might lay stress upon one or another of those, and they are all very properly to be emphasized when thinking of a Christian’s duty and a Christian’s privilege; but when we think of what God is requiring of the Church, there is one thing that I believe covers the entire matter, and if you and I see that one thing it will help us in all that we do and all our thinking along those lines.

We ask ourselves what was it that Jesus specially did, what quality was it that Jesus specially developed? What was it that the Father saw in him that was well pleasing? By what process did he gain a great prize and come off conqueror? What was it that he did? What was it in all his experiences that he learned? The Bible answers that he learned *Obedience* by the things which he suffered. And I understand, dear brothers and sisters, what we have specially to learn is *Obedience*. Now I would like to impress this thought in my mind and in the minds of all who are present. God looks for obedience. When Jesus came, you remember, and was thirty years of age, and presented himself at Jordan in consecration to do the Father’s will, what did he say? Lo, I come to do thy will, O God—I have come here to be obedient to your will, whatever your will is, in things great or small, difficult or easy—your will is that which I am here to do. And that should be your attitude and mine, dear brethren and sisters. This is the only proper attitude. I have found some dear Christian brethren and sisters who seem to have a different thought. They seem to think, now God wants me to make some sacrifice, and I will make a particular sacrifice of my own. Jesus did not so say. Jesus did not say, I am going to make a great big sacrifice of my own. He says, I just want to do whatever the Father wants to have done, nothing more, nothing less. And so it is with you and me. We are not to pick out something, and say, Now how can I scheme something and work up something and do something that will be novel, and God will say, What a wonderful thing you have done. We are not able to surprise God, dear friends, by any wonderful things we can do, and every time we think we are going to do some wonderful thing, by the time we get through with it we will find it is a very foolish thing—sure to be so. And just the right attitude, then, is Father, what is thy will? What sayest thou for me to do? All of

Jesus' ministry was spent in this way. You remember he began thus at the very beginning of his ministry and said, Lo, I come, as in the volume of the Book it is written of me, to do thy will—everything that is written in the Book; everything that is in the Bible. Everything that God has been telling for all these previous centuries what the Messiah would do, I am here, Father, to do any and everything you would have for me to do. To my understanding, our Lord Jesus did not at first comprehend all that he was to do. Those things written in the Book were still hidden to him. When he made his consecration, you remember he had not yet been begotten of the Holy Spirit. It was after he had made his consecration, and after he had gone down into the water, and symbolized his consecration by baptism, that the Holy Spirit came on him, and the higher things, the heavens—were opened unto him and he began to see deep spiritual truth, began to understand those things of which he had knowledge previously but not an understanding. Just the same as you and I at one time had some knowledge of what was written in the Law and in the Prophets, but we did not have an understanding of it. We knew the Scriptures stated this and stated that, but what did that mean, and what did this mean? So it was with our Lord, before he was begotten of the Spirit. He knew those things were written there; he knew those things written in parables and dark sayings; he knew God had that all covered up, and he knew he had come to be the Messiah, he knew the Messiah was to fulfill all those various things; but now, what was he to do? He did not see how those things could be fulfilled, for he did not know what they meant. There he saw the bullock of the Sin-offering and the goat of the Sin-offering, and the scape-goat, and the sprinkling of the blood—what do they mean? And he saw the typical Passover lamb, saw the killing of the lamb, and the eating of its flesh, and the sprinkling of the blood, and the eating of the unleavened bread, herbs, etc.—but what did they mean? He saw the first-born of Israel were passed over and he saw that they became the Priests and Levites of the future—but what did it mean? Just as soon as he received the Holy Spirit, those things began to be opened up to him, he began to understand them. Then what did it mean? Oh, then he saw that he had already contracted to do the things that he now came to understand fully. That is to say, he began to see that the bullock represented himself and his sacrifice; he began to see that the copper serpent on the pole was merely a type of himself; that as Moses raised up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of Man be lifted up; and that as people looked to the serpent and were healed of the bite of the fiery serpents, so humanity is to look up to him as the great sin-bearer, and have their sins and their pains, etc., which are the result of sin, healed of the bite of the serpent.

But the whole lesson for Jesus was, first, would he, without understanding all the terms agree to do God's will, at any cost?—he did that when he left the heavenly glory. He said, Father, if you have a glorious plan, and if you have intended me to be the instrument of that plan, although you have not told me how it is to be worked out yet, nevertheless I am ready; I will lay aside the heavenly glory, and I will assume the earthly condition—you see that is a necessary step. And that is all I ask, just let me see one step and I will

take that step. So he found himself in fashion as a man. Now he said Father, what is the next step—I delight to do thy will—everything that is written in the Book. Then the Father showed him the things written in the Book. Then you see how the remainder of his life was filled up with doing all the things that he could find were written in the Book. Now what was all of that? *Obedience*—the spirit of obedience. It was the spirit of obedience from the beginning that prompted him to lay aside the heavenly glory and assume the human nature. It was the spirit of obedience then that led him to say, Now, Father, here I am; for this purpose I have come into the world, now here I give myself away. *Obedience*. Then after he began to see more and to understand better, obedience still came in, and he said, this is the thing to be done, and that is to be done next, and the other is to be done afterwards, so step by step our Lord’s pathway was a pathway of obedience and an obedience that cost him something. Every step that he took cost him something.

Now dear friends, you and I are invited to walk in his footsteps—in his steps of obedience. It is the obedience that God is counting. It is the obedience that is going to make you acceptable in God’s sight. Obedience to the Commander means loyalty. Suppose a soldier in the army who would say, Did the general issue that order? Yes. Well, I don’t understand what that means, I am not going to do it until I understand more about it. As soon as I know where the things ends, then I will begin to be obedient. That man would not be a loyal soldier. The business of a soldier is to be obedient. He knows that when he enlists. So when you and I have enlisted to be soldiers of the cross, it means obedience, whatever the Lord’s providence brings to us, whatever the Lord’s words shall indicate to us, to do not only his will, but to do it with delight.

We mentioned this morning how some have had a hesitancy saying, “Now is it necessary to be baptized?”—a wrong spirit entirely, you see, to be enquiring as to it being necessary—as though it were compulsion. There is no delight to do God’s will. Father, what is thy will? Show me what it is, make it plain to me, I am ready, willing, anxious to do everything that is written in your Book—all that you have marked out for this elect class.

Jesus has gone before. He has set us an example, and we are walking in his steps of obedience. They had led us thus far, and a blessing has come with every step of obedience we have taken, if we have taken it with the right condition of heart, and a blessing awaits every future step you and I will take if we simply take the future steps with loyalty to God and delight and pleasure in doing the will of our Heavenly Father. And thus right down to the end of the journey, all the steps will be blessed of the Lord, and all who thus follow in the footsteps of Jesus, in the footsteps of obedience, thankful obedience, will all find themselves shortly, dear friends, in the kingdom.

Below is a “Selection” that was sent to us early this year, by a sister on our mailing list. The “Selection” was sent to her by a sister 90 years old, who was isolated and living in Alabama. It has some very choice thoughts in it for our nourishment as New Creatures.

“Today is a slender bridge which will bear its own load, but it will collapse if we add tomorrow’s. In every year there are three hundred and sixty-five letters from the King, each with its own message—‘Bear this for me.’ What shall we do with the letters? Open them a day at a time. Yesterday’s seal is broken; lay that letter reverently away; yesterday’s cross is laid down, never to be carried again. Tomorrow’s letter lies on the table; do not break the seal. For when tomorrow becomes today, there will stand beside us an unseen figure; and His hand will be in ours, and His gaze will be in our eyes, as He says with a loving smile, ‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be.’ The golden summary of life is to be this: as to the past, a record of gratitude; as to the present, a record of service; and as to the future, a record of trust.”