

BEING
GOD'S
FRIEND

CHARLES
SPURGEON

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FRIEND



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Publisher's note:

Spurgeon's selection of Bible versions has been retained whenever possible, including the Revised Version when it was originally cited. The text of this book, however, has been edited for the modern reader. Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been updated for clarity and readability.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.
Scripture quotations marked (RV) are taken from the Revised Version of the Bible.

Being God's Friend

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ONE

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

—Hebrews 11:8

Obedience—what a blessing it would be if we were all trained to it by the Holy Spirit! If we were perfectly obedient, we would be fully restored. If the whole world would obey the Lord, it would be heaven on earth. Perfect obedience to God would mean love among men, justice to all classes, and peace in every land. Our wills bring envy, malice, war. But if we would only obey the Lord’s will, we would receive love, joy,

rest, and bliss. Obedience—let us pray for it for ourselves and others!

Is there a heart that will not bend
To thy divine control?
Descend, O sovereign love, descend,
And melt that stubborn soul!

I want to emphasize part of the verse from Hebrews 11 that starts this chapter: “*By faith Abraham...obeyed.*” It is certainly true that although we have had to mourn our disobedience with many tears and sighs, we now find joy in yielding ourselves as servants of the Lord: Our deepest desire is to do the Lord’s will in all things. Oh, for obedience! It has been supposed by many badly instructed people that the doctrine of justification by faith is opposed to the teaching of good works, or obedience. There is no truth in the supposition. We who believe in justification by faith teach the obedience of faith.

Faith is the fountain, the foundation, and the fosterer of obedience. Men do not obey God until they believe Him. We preach faith so that men may be brought to obedience. To disbelieve is to disobey. One of the first signs of practical obedience is found in the obedience of the mind, the understanding, and the heart; and this is expressed in believing the teaching of Christ, trusting in His work, and resting in His salvation. Faith is the morning star of obedience. If we want to work the work of God, we must believe on Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Beloved, we do not give a secondary place to obedience, as some suppose. We look on the obedience of the heart to the will of God as salvation. The attainment of perfect obedience would mean perfect salvation. We regard sanctification, or obedience, as the great purpose for which the Savior died. He shed His blood so that He might cleanse us from dead works and purify unto Himself a people “*zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:14).

It is for this that we were chosen: We are “*elect...unto obedience*” (1 Peter 1:2) and holiness. We know nothing of an election in which we would continue in sin. It is for this that we have been called: We are “*called to be saints*” (Romans 1:7). Obedience is the principal objective of the work of grace in the hearts of those who are chosen and called. We are to become obedient children, conformed to the image of Jesus, our Elder Brother, with whom the Father is “*well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17).

THE OBEDIENCE THAT COMES FROM FAITH

The obedience that comes from faith is a noble obedience. The obedience of a slave ranks only a little higher than the obedience of a well-trained horse or dog, for it is tuned to the crack of the whip. Obedience that is not cheerfully rendered is not the obedience of the heart and, consequently, is of little worth before God. If a person obeys because he has no choice in the matter and would rebel if he had the opportunity, there is nothing in his obedience. The obedience of faith springs from an internal principle and not from external compulsion.

It is sustained by the mind's most sober reasoning and the heart's warmest passion.

It happens in this way: A person reasons with himself that he ought to obey his Redeemer, his Father, his God; and, at the same time, the love of Christ constrains him to do so. Therefore, what argument suggests, affection performs. A sense of great obligation, an understanding of the justness of obedience, and a spiritual renewal of the heart produce an obedience that becomes essential to the sanctified soul. Therefore, he is not unprepared in the time of temptation or destroyed in the hour of losses and sufferings. There is no trial of life that can turn the gracious soul from his passion for obedience, and death itself will only enable him to render an obedience that will be as blissful as it will be complete. A chief ingredient of heaven is that we will see the face of our Lord and “*serve him day and night in his temple*” (Revelation 7:15). Meanwhile, the more fully we obey while we are still on earth, the nearer we will be to His temple gate. May the Holy Spirit work in us so that, by faith—like Abraham—we may obey!

THE OBEDIENCE OF A CHILD

I am writing to you about absolute obedience to the Lord God. Yet I am referring to the obedience of a child, not the obedience of a slave; the obedience of love, not of terror; the obedience of faith, not of dread. As God helps me, I will urge you to seek a stronger faith so that you may reach this obedience. “*By faith Abraham...obeyed.*” In every case where the

father of the faithful obeyed, it was the result of his faith. And in every case in which you and I will render true obedience, it will be the product of our faith.

Obedience that God can accept never comes out of a heart that thinks God is a liar. It is worked in us by the Spirit of the Lord, through our belief in the truth, love, and grace of our God in Christ Jesus. If you are currently being disobedient, or have been so, the road to a better state of things is trust in God. You cannot hope to render obedience merely by forcing your conduct into a certain groove or by using unaided, determined effort. There is a free-grace road to obedience, and that is receiving, by faith, the Lord Jesus, who is the gift of God and who *“of God is made unto us...sanctification”* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

We accept the Lord Jesus by faith, and He teaches us obedience, creating it in us. The more faith in Him that we have, the more obedience to Him we will manifest. Obedience naturally flows out of faith, *“for as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he”* (Proverbs 23:7); and the holy obedience of a person's life will be in proportion to the strength and purity of his faith in God, as He is revealed in Christ Jesus.

So that we can best understand how to apply these truths to our lives, let us consider several important aspects of obedience to God: the kind of faith that produces obedience, the kind of obedience that faith produces, and the kind of life that comes out of this faith and obedience. Let us trust the Holy Spirit for His gracious illumination.

FAITH THAT PRODUCES OBEDIENCE

Beloved in the Lord, we know that He is sovereign and that His will is law. We feel that God, our Maker, our Preserver, our Redeemer, and our Father should have our unswerving service. We unite, also, in confessing that we are not our own, for we are bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The Lord our God has a right to us that we would not wish to question. He has a greater claim on our fervent service than He has on the services of angels; for while they were created as we have been, they still have never been redeemed by precious blood as we have.

FAITH IN GOD'S RIGHT TO COMMAND

Faith that produces obedience is therefore faith in God and His right to command our obedience. Our glorious, incarnate God has an unquestioned right to every breath we breathe, to every thought we think, to every moment of our lives, and to every capacity of our being. We believe that it is right and just that Jehovah is our Lawgiver and our Ruler. This loyalty of our minds is based on faith and is a chief factor that persuades us to obey. Always cultivate this feeling. The Lord is our Father, but He is "*Our Father which art in heaven*" (Matthew 6:9). He draws near to us in condescension; but it is condescension, and we must not presume to think of Him as though He were like us.

There is a holy familiarity with God that cannot be enjoyed too much; but there is also a flippant familiarity with

God that cannot be abhorred too much. The Lord is King. His will is not to be questioned; His every word is law. Let us never question His sovereign right to decree what He pleases and to fulfill the decree, to command what He pleases and to punish every shortcoming. Because we have faith in God as Lord of all, we gladly pay Him our homage, and we desire in all things to say, *“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10).

FAITH IN THE JUSTNESS OF GOD'S COMMANDS

Next, we must have faith in the rightness of all that God says or does. I hope that you do not think of God's sovereignty as tyranny or imagine that He ever could or would will anything except what is right. Neither should we admit into our minds a suspicion that the Word of God is incorrect in any matter whatever, as though the Lord Himself could err. We will not accept that God, in His Holy Book, makes mistakes about matters of history or science any more than He does about the great truths of salvation. If the Lord is God, He must be infallible; and if He can be described as being in error in the little respects of human history and science, He cannot be trusted in the greater matters.

Beloved, Jehovah never errs in deed or in word. And when we find His law written either in the Ten Commandments or anywhere else, we believe that there is not one precept too many or too few. Whatever the precepts of the law or the Gospel may be, they are pure and altogether holy. The words

of the Lord are like “*fine gold*” (Psalm 19:10), pure, precious, and weighty—not one of them may be neglected.

We hear people talking about “minor points of the law” and so on. However, we must not consider any word of our God as a minor thing if, by that expression, it is implied that it is of small importance. We must accept every single word of precept or prohibition or instruction as being what it ought to be, neither to be diminished nor increased. We should not reason about the command of God as though it might be set aside or amended. He commands; we obey. May we enter into that true spirit of obedience, which is the unshakable belief that the Lord is right! Nothing short of this is the obedience of the inner man—the obedience that the Lord desires.

FAITH IN OUR PERSONAL OBLIGATION TO OBEY

Furthermore, we must have faith in the Lord’s call upon us to obey. Abraham went out from his father’s house because he felt that, whatever God may have said to others, He had spoken to him and said, “*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee*” (Genesis 12:1). Whatever the Lord may have said to the Chaldeans or to other families in Ur, Abraham was not so much concerned with that as with the special word of command that the Lord had sent to his own soul.

Oh, if only we were earnest to render personal obedience most of all! It is very easy to offer to God a sort of “other people’s obedience”—to imagine that we are serving God when we are finding fault with our neighbors and complaining that

they are not as godly as they ought to be. It is true that we cannot help seeing their shortcomings, but we would do well to be less observant of these shortcomings than we are. Let us turn our magnifying glasses on ourselves. It is not so much our business to be weeding other people's gardens as it is to be keeping our own vineyards. Each person should pray, "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6).

We who are His chosen, redeemed from among men and called out from the rest of mankind, ought to feel that if no other ears hear the divine call, our ears must; and if no other hearts obey, our souls rejoice to do so. The apostle Paul wrote that we are to present ourselves to God as "*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service*" (Romans 12:1). The strongest ties of gratitude hold us to the service of Jesus. We must be obedient in life to Him who, for our sakes, was obedient unto death (Philippians 2:8).

Our service to our Lord is freedom. We want to yield to His will. To delight Him is our delight. It is a blessed thing when the inmost nature yearns to obey God, when obedience grows into a habit and becomes the very element in which the spirit breathes. Surely this should be the case with every one of the blood-washed children of the Most High, and their lives will prove that it is so. Others are also bound to obey, but we should attend most to our own personal obligations and set our own houses in order. Obedience should begin at home, and it will find its hands full enough there.

FAITH THAT IS OUR CHIEF AUTHORITY

Genuine obedience arises out of a faith that is the chief authority over all our actions. The kind of faith that produces obedience is lord of the understanding; it is a royal faith. The true believer believes in God more than he believes in anything else and everything else. He can say, "*Let God be true, but every man a liar*" (Romans 3:4). His faith in God has become the crown of all his belief, the most assured of all his confidences.

As gold is to inferior metals, so is our trust in God to all our other trusts. To the genuine believer, the eternal is as much above the temporal as the heavens are above the earth. The infinite rolls, like Noah's flood, over the tops of the hills of the present and the finite. If a truth is infused with the glory of God, the believer will value it. However, if God and eternity are not in it, he will leave trifles to those who choose them. You must have a paramount faith in God or else the will of God will not be a sovereign rule to you. Only a reigning faith will make us subject to its power so that we will be obedient to the Lord in all things.

The chief thought in life with the true believer is: How can I obey God? His greatest concern is to do the will of God or to yield to that will in a way that is pleasing to God. And if he can obey, he will not negotiate with God or be distracted with any reservations on his part. He will pray, "Refine me from the dross of rebellion, and let the furnace be as fierce as You will." His choice is neither wealth nor ease nor honor, but that he may glorify God in his body and in his spirit, which

are God's (1 Corinthians 6:20). Obedience has become as much his rule as self-will is the rule of others. His cry to the Lord is, "By your command I stay or go. Your will is my will; Your pleasure is my pleasure; Your law is my love."

May God grant us a supreme, overmastering faith, for this is the kind of faith that we must have if we are to lead obedient lives. We must have faith in God's right to rule, faith in the justness of His commands, faith in our personal obligation to obey, and faith that His commands must be the chief authority of our lives. With the faith that belongs to God's elect, we will realize the object of our election, namely, "*that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*" (Ephesians 1:4).

FAITH IN ACTION

Dear friend, do you have this kind of faith? I will withdraw the question and ask it of myself: Do I have that faith that leads me to obey my God? For obedience, if it is the kind of which we are speaking, is faith in action—faith walking with God or, should I say, walking "*before the LORD in the land of the living*" (Psalm 116:9)? If we have a faith that is greedy in hearing, severe in judging, and rapid in self-congratulation but not inclined to obedience, we have the faith of hypocrites. If our faith enables us to set ourselves up as patterns of sound doctrine and qualifies us to crack the heads of all who differ from us yet lacks the fruit of obedience, it will leave us among the "dogs" mentioned in the book of Revelation, who are outside the city of God.

The only faith that distinguishes the children of God is the faith that makes us obey. It is better to have the faith that obeys than the faith that moves mountains. I would rather have the faith that obeys than the faith that heaps the altar of God with sacrifices and perfumes His courts with incense. I would rather obey God than rule an empire. For, after all, the loftiest sovereignty a soul can inherit is dominion over self by rendering a believing obedience to the Most High. Therefore, this is the kind of faith we need: "*By faith Abraham...obeyed.*" The only way you and I can obey is by faith alone.

THE OBEDIENCE THAT FAITH PRODUCES

Let us now consider the kind of obedience that faith produces. I will illustrate this by what we can learn from taking the verse as a whole.

IMMEDIATE OBEDIENCE

Genuine faith in God creates a prompt obedience. "*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed.*" Abraham immediately responded to the command. Delayed obedience is disobedience. I wish some Christians who put off duties would remember this. Continued delay of duty is a continuous sin. If I do not obey the divine command, I sin; and every moment that I continue in that condition, I repeat the sin. This is a serious matter. If a certain act is my duty at this hour and I leave it undone, I have sinned. But it will be equally

incumbent upon me during the next hour; and if I still refuse, I disobey again, and so on, until I do obey.

Neglect of a standing command must grow very grievous if it is persisted in for years. To the extent that the conscience becomes callous on the subject, the guilt becomes even more provoking to the Lord in proportion. To refuse to do right is a great evil. However, it is far worse to continue in that refusal until the conscience grows numb on the matter.

I remember a person who came to be baptized. He said that he had been a believer in the Lord Jesus for forty years and had always believed that the ordinance was scriptural. I felt grieved that he had been disobedient to a known duty for so long, and I proposed to him that he should be baptized at once. It was in a village, and he said that there was no place convenient for it. I offered to go with him to the brook and baptize him, but he said, “No, *‘he that believeth shall not make haste’*” (Isaiah 28:16).

Here was someone who had willfully disobeyed his Lord for as many years as the Israelites were in the wilderness, in a matter that was very easy to fulfill. Yet, after confessing his fault, he was not willing to amend it but instead perverted a passage of Scripture to excuse himself in further delay. David said, “*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments*” (Psalm 119:60). I give this case as a typical illustration; there are a hundred spiritual, moral, domestic, business, and religious duties that men put off in the same manner, as if they thought that any time would do for God and that He must take His turn with the rest.

What would you say to your son if you told him to go on an errand and he answered you, "I will go tomorrow." Surely you would give him "tomorrow" in a way that he would not soon forget. Your tone would be sharp, and you would tell him to go at once. If he then promised to go in an hour, would you call that obedience? It would be impudence. Obedience is for the present tense; it must be prompt or else it is nothing. Obedience respects the time of the command as much as any other part of it. To hesitate is to be disloyal. To stop and consider whether or not you will obey is rebellion in the seed. If you believe in the living God for eternal life, you will be quick to do your Lord's commands, even as a maid obeys her mistress. You will not be like a horse, which needs whip and spur. Your love will do more for you than compulsion could do for slaves. You will have wings on your heels to speed you along the way of obedience. "*To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart*" (Psalm 95:7-8).

EXACT OBEDIENCE

Next, obedience should be exact. Even Abraham's obedience failed somewhat in this at first. He started at once from Ur of the Chaldees but only went as far as Haran and stayed there until his father died. Then the command came to him again, and he set off for the land that the Lord had promised to show him. If you have only half-obeyed, I pray that you may pay close attention to this. Do all that the Lord commands and be very careful not to withhold any part of the revenue of obedience.

Yet the great patriarch's error was soon corrected, for we read that "*Abraham, when he was called to go out...went out.*" I have only omitted intermediate words, which do not alter the meaning. This is exactly how we should obey. We should do what the Lord commands—just that, and not another thing of our own devising.

It is very interesting how people try to give God something other than what He asks for. The Lord says, "*My son, give me thine heart*" (Proverbs 23:26), and they give Him ceremonies. He asks for obedience, and they give Him man-made religion. He asks for faith and love and justice, and they offer meaningless sacrifices. They will give everything except the one thing that He will be pleased with: "*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams*" (1 Samuel 15:22).

If the Lord has given you true faith in Himself, you will not be concerned so much about doing a notable thing as about doing exactly what God would have you to do. Pay attention to even the smallest parts of the Lord's precepts. Attention to little things is a fine feature of obedience. The essence of obedience lies much more in the little things than in the great ones. Few dare to rush into great crimes; yet people will indulge in secret rebellion, for their hearts are not right with God. Therefore, too many mar what they call obedience by forgetting that they serve a God who searches the heart and tries the mind, who observes thoughts and motives. He wants us to obey Him with the heart. This will lead us not merely to regard a few pleasing commands, but also to

respect His entire will. Oh, for a tender conscience that will not willfully neglect or presumptuously transgress!

PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE

Next, make a special note of the fact that Abraham rendered practical obedience. When the Lord commanded Abraham to leave his father's house, he did not say that he would think it over; he did not discuss the pros and cons in an essay; he did not ask his father, Terah, or his neighbors to consider it. Rather, as he was called to go out, he went out. Dear friends, we have so much talk and so little obedience! The religion of mere brain and jaw does not amount to much. We lack the religion of hands and feet.

I remember a place in Yorkshire, England, where, years ago, a good man said to me, "We have a real good minister." I said, "I am glad to hear it." "Yes," he said, "he is a fellow who preaches with his feet." Well, now, it is an excellent thing if a preacher preaches with his feet by walking with God and with his hands by working for God. A person does well if he glorifies God by where he goes and by what he does. He will surpass fifty others who only preach religion with their tongues. You, dear readers, are not good hearers as long as you are only hearers. But when the heart is affected by the ear and the hand follows the heart, then your faith is proved. That kind of obedience, which comes from faith in God, is real obedience since it shows itself by its works.

FARSEEING OBEDIENCE

Moreover, faith produces a farseeing obedience. Note this: “Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance.” How many people would obey God if they were paid for it on the spot! They have “respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Hebrews 11:26), but they must have it in the palms of their hands. With them, “A bird in hand is better far, than two which in the bushes are.” When they are told that there is heaven to be gained, they answer that if heaven were to be had here as an immediate freehold, they might attend to it—but they cannot afford to wait. To inherit a country after this life is over is too much like a fairy tale for their practical minds.

There are many who inquire, “Will religion pay? Is there any benefit? Will I have to close my shop on Sundays? Must I alter the way I do business and curtail my profits?” When these people have totaled up the cost and taken all things into consideration, they come to the conclusion that obedience to God is a luxury, a luxury that they can dispense with—at least until close to the end of their lives.

Those who practice the obedience of faith look for the future reward and set the greatest store by it. To their faith alone, the profit is exceedingly great. For them, to take up the cross will be to carry a burden, but it will also be to find rest. They know the saying, “No cross, no crown.” They recognize the truth that, if there is no obedience here on earth, there will be no future reward. This requires a faith that has eyes

that can “see afar off” (2 Peter 1:9), across the black torrent of death and within the veil that separates us from the unseen. A person will not obey God unless he has learned to endure “as seeing him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27).

UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE

Also, remember that the obedience that comes from true faith is often required to be altogether unhesitating and unquestioning, for it is written, “*He went out, not knowing whither he went.*” God commanded Abraham to journey, and he moved his camp at once. Into the unknown land he made his way; through fertile regions or across a wilderness, among friends or through the midst of foes, he pursued his journey. He did not know where his way would take him, but he knew that the Lord had commanded him to go. Even bad men will obey God when they agree with Him, but good men will obey His commands when they do not know what to think of them. It is not ours to judge the Lord’s commands, but to follow them. I am weary of hearing people say, “Yes, we know that such a course would be right, but then the consequences might be painful: Good men would be grieved, the cause would be weakened, and we ourselves would get into a world of trouble and put our hands into a hornets’ nest.” There is not much need to preach caution nowadays. Those who are willing to run any risk for the truth’s sake are few enough. In the last few years, not many people have developed consciences that are tender about the Lord’s honor. Prudent consideration of consequences is

superabundant, but the spirit that obeys and dares all things for Christ's sake—where is it?

The Abrahams of today will not go out from the people and surroundings with which they are familiar. They will put up with anything rather than risk their livelihoods. If they do go out, they must know where they are going and how much is to be gleaned in the new country. I am not pronouncing any judgment on their conduct; I am merely pointing out the fact. Our Puritan forefathers had little regard for property or liberty when these stood in the way of conscience; they would defy exile and danger rather than give up a grain of truth. But their descendants prefer peace and worldly amusements and pride themselves on “culture” rather than on heroic faith. The modern believer must have no mysteries. He must have everything planed down to a scientific standard. Abraham “*went out, not knowing whither he went,*” but people today must have every bit of information with regard to the way—and then they still will not go. If they obey at all, it is because their own superior judgments tend in that direction. But, to go forth at all hazards, not knowing where they are going, is not to their liking at all. They are so highly “cultured” that they prefer to be original and map out their own way.

My friend, once you've discerned the voice of God, obey without question. If you have to stand alone and if no one will befriend you, stand alone; God will befriend you. If you get an unfavorable word from those you value most, bear it. What, after all, are unfavorable words or good words, compared with a clear conscience kept by walking in the way of

the Lord? The line of truth is as narrow as a razor's edge, and the one who wants to keep to such a line needs to wear the golden sandals of the peace of God. Through divine grace, may we, like Abraham, walk with our hands in the hand of the Lord, even where we cannot see our way!

CONTINUOUS OBEDIENCE

The obedience that faith produces also must be continuous. Having begun the separated life, Abraham continued to dwell in tents and sojourn in a land far from the place of his birth. His whole life may be summed up in this way: "*By faith Abraham...obeyed.*" He believed and, therefore, he walked before the Lord in a perfect way. He even offered up his son Isaac. "Abraham's mistake," was it? How dare anyone talk in that way! By faith, he obeyed; to the end of his life, he was never an original speculator or inventor of ways for self-will, but rather a submissive servant of that great Lord who condescended to call him "*Friend*" (James 2:23). May it be said of you that by faith you obeyed! Do not cultivate doubt, or you will soon cultivate disobedience. Set this up as your standard, and from now on let this be the epitome of your life: "*By faith, he obeyed.*"

THE LIFE OF FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

We must, therefore, wholeheartedly believe in God and eagerly serve Him. Now, what sort of life will result from our faith and obedience?

LIFE WITHOUT RISK

We will live our lives without that great risk that otherwise holds us in peril. A person runs a great risk when he steers himself. Rocks or no rocks, the peril lies in the helmsman. However, the believer is no longer the helmsman of his own vessel; he has taken a Pilot on board. To believe in God and do what He commands is a great escape from the hazards of personal weakness and folly. If we do as God commands and do not seem to succeed, it is no fault of ours. Failure itself would be a success—as long as we did not fail to obey.

If we were to pass through life unrecognized or were only acknowledged by a sneer from the worldly wise, it could be borne with calm confidence, as long as we knew that we had kept our faith toward God and our obedience to Him. Providence is God's business; obedience is ours. Whatever comes out of our life's course must remain with the Lord. To obey is our sole concern. What harvest will come from our sowing we must leave with the Lord of the harvest; but we ourselves must take care of the basket and the seed, scattering our handfuls in the furrows without fail. We can win the compliment, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (Matthew 25:23). To be a successful servant is not in our power, and we will not be held responsible for it. Our greatest risk is over once we obey; God makes faith and obedience the way of safety.

LIFE FREE FROM THE HEAVIEST CARES

Next, we will enjoy a life free from life's heaviest cares. If we were in the middle of Africa with Stanley, the

newsman who found missionary Dr. David Livingstone, our pressing concern would be to find our way out. Yet, when we have nothing to do but obey, our road is mapped out for us. Jesus said, "*Follow me*" (Matthew 4:19); this makes our way plain and lifts a load of cares from our shoulders.

To choose our course by human reasoning is a way of thorns. To obey is like traveling on the king's highway. When we follow our own methods, we have to sail against the wind and try to get back to our original course; often we miss the port altogether. But faith, like a steamship, steers straight for the harbor's mouth and leaves a bright track of obedience behind her as she forges ahead.

When our only concern is to obey, a thousand other cares take flight. If we sin in order to succeed, we have sown the seeds of care and sorrow, and the reaping will be a grievous one. If we forsake the path and try shortcuts, we will have to do a degree of wading through mire and slough, we will spatter ourselves from head to foot, and we will be wearied trying to find our way—all because we could not trust God and obey His instructions. Obedience may appear difficult and may bring sacrifice with it; after all, though, it is the nearest and the best road. The ways of obedience are, in the long run, "*ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*" (Proverbs 3:17). The person who is always believing and obedient, through the strength of the Holy Spirit, has chosen the "*good part*" (Luke 10:42). It is he who can sing,

I have no cares, O blessed Lord,
 For all my cares are Thine;
 I live in triumph, too, for Thou
 Hast made Thy triumphs mine.

Or, to change the verse, he is like the shepherd boy in the Valley of Humiliation from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*; for that lowland is part of the great Plain of Obedience, and he also can sing,

He that is down need fear no fall,
 He that is low no pride;
 He that is humble ever shall
 Have God to be his Guide.

Although he may not reach the heights of ambition or stand on the dizzying cliffs of presumption, he will know superior joys. He has hit upon the happiest mode of living under heaven—a mode of life corresponding to the perfect life above. He will dwell in God's house and will be continually praising Him.

LIFE OF THE HIGHEST HONOR

Moreover, the way of obedience is a life of the highest honor. Obedience is the glory of a human life—the glory that our Lord Jesus has given to His chosen, even His own glory. “*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered*” (Hebrews 5:8). He never forged an original course but always did the things that pleased the Father. Let

this be our glory. By faith, we yield our intelligence to the highest intelligence; we are led, guided, and directed, and we follow where our Lord has gone. To us who believe, He is honor. To a soldier, it is the greatest honor to have accomplished his sovereign's command. He does not debase his manhood when he subjects it to honorable command. On the contrary, he is even exalted by obeying in the day of danger. It is no dishonor to have it said of us, as Tennyson did of the British cavalry in "The Charge of the Light Brigade,"

Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.

The bravest and the most honored of men are those who implicitly obey the command of the King of Kings. The best among His children are those who know their Father's mind the best and who yield to it in the most joyful obedience. Within the walls of our Father's house, should we have any other ambition than to be children perfectly obedient before Him and implicitly trusting toward Him?

A LIFE OF COMMUNION WITH GOD

Yet, my friend, this is a kind of life that will bring communion with God. God often hides His face behind the clouds of dust that His children make by their self-will. If we transgress against Him, we will soon be in trouble. However, a holy walk—the walk described by our Scripture text as faith that produces obedience—is heaven beneath the stars. God comes down to walk with men who obey. If they walk with

Him, He walks with them. The Lord can only have fellowship with His servants as they obey. Obedience is heaven in us, and it is the prelude to our being in heaven. Obedient faith is the way to eternal life; no—it is eternal life revealing itself.

A LIFE TO IMITATE

The obedience of faith creates a form of life that may be safely copied. As parents, we wish to live in such a way that our children may imitate us to their lasting profit. Teachers should aspire to be what they want their classes to be. If you have received your own schooling in the obedience of faith, you will be a good teacher. Children usually exaggerate their models, but there is no need to fear that they will go too far in faith or in obedience to the Lord. I like to hear a man say, when his father has gone, “My dear father was a man who feared God, and I desire to follow in his footsteps. When I was a boy, I thought he was rather stiff and puritanical, but now I see that he had a good reason for it all. I feel much the same myself and would do nothing of which God would not approve.”

The bringing up of families is a very important matter. This topic is neglected too much nowadays; however, it is the most profitable of all holy service and is the hope of the future. Great men, in the best sense, are bred in holy households. A God-fearing example at home is the most fruitful of religious agencies.

I knew a humble little church that belonged to one of the strictest sects of Christianity. There was nothing cultural

about the ministry, but the people were staunch believers. Five or six families who attended that despised ministry learned to truly believe what they believed and to live it out. It was by no means a liberal creed that they received, but what they believed affected their lives. They became substantial in wealth and generous and benevolent in giving.

These families all sprang from plain, humble men who knew their Bibles and believed the doctrines of grace. They learned to fear God, to trust in Him, and to rest in the old faith—and they prospered even in worldly things. Their third generation descendants do not all adhere to their way of thinking, but they have risen through God's blessing on their grandfathers. These men were fed on substantial meat, and they became sturdy old fellows, able to cope with the world and fight their way. I wish we had more men today who would maintain truth at all costs. May the Lord give us back those whose examples can be safely copied in all things, even though they may be denounced as being "rigid" or "too precise." We serve a jealous God and a holy Savior. Let us make sure we do not grieve His Spirit and cause Him to withdraw from us.

A LIFE THAT NEEDS GREAT GRACE

In addition, faith that produces obedience is a kind of life that needs great grace. Those who profess faith but who are not diligent in practicing it will not live in this way. Maintaining the faith that obeys in everything requires watchfulness and prayer and nearness to God. Beloved, "he

giveth more grace" (James 4:6). The Lord will enable you to add to your faith all the virtues (2 Peter 1:5–8).

Whenever you fail in any respect in your life, do not sit down and question the goodness of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. That is not the way to increase the stream of obedience, but rather the way to diminish the source of it. Believe more instead of less. Try, by God's grace, to believe more in the pardon of sin, more in the renovation by the Holy Spirit, more in the everlasting covenant, more in the love that had no beginning and will never, never cease. Your hope does not lie in rushing into the darkness of doubt but in returning repentantly into the still clearer light of a steadier faith. May you be helped to do so; may we and the whole multitude of the Lord's redeemed go on, by faith, to obey our Lord in all things!

Remember, "*By faith Abraham...obeyed.*" Have faith in God, and then obey, obey, obey, and keep on obeying, until the Lord calls you home. Obey on earth, and then you will have learned to obey in heaven. Obedience is the rehearsal of eternal bliss. Practice now, by obedience, the song that you will sing forever in glory. God grant His grace to us!