

OBEDIENCE BETTER THAN SACRIFICE.

How necessary it is that we all hear and obey the voice of our good Shepherd. "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me," was the Master's pointed statement of the case. And it is all in vain that any ignore his words, and yet hope to abide in his love and favor. An illustration of this truth came forcibly to our attention during the past six weeks, and we relate it here, not for the sake of the one vitally concerned, but for the benefit of others who may have similar besetments, and to whom this narrative may prove "a word in season," cautioning that obedience is *better* than sacrifice.

One of the Colporteurs, an earnest, devoted sacrificer, but whose spiritual state had for some time caused us anxiety, recently wrote to us that the *peace* of God no longer ruled his heart; that he had lost that communion with the Lord which is so essential to a Christian's happiness and welfare. Some extracts from his letters at the time will show his deplorable state, and give cause for the greater rejoicing that he has since been restored to divine favor. On receipt of his first letter, telling of his plight and asking for help, we felt greatly relieved, knowing that it was a hopeful sign to see him realizing his position and longing for divine favor, and so we wrote. In reply he said: –

Dear Brother Russell: – Your kind letter received. It both surprised me and made me feel ashamed. The surprise was that you say I was nearer to God and nearer to his blessing when I wrote my last letter than for a long time before; while in reality I feel as if God is now far from me. The more I try to lay hold on his promises the less I seem to realize them as mine. The Lord knows what is in my heart, anyhow, so I might as well reveal it. I have kept the matter to myself long enough and found that it did

not change my wretched condition of heart. The shame is that I should need such advice as you gave me – to "lay aside my proud, know-it-all spirit," etc. I feel the full force of that advice, as I am indeed guilty of just such a spirit. I always knew that I had a strong self-will, and therefore hesitated almost two years to be immersed, because I knew it symbolized the death of self, the death of my own will.

I had always tried to keep self under but failed, till at last, considering God's promise, that his grace is sufficient for us, I took the step and made outwardly the confession that I would reckon myself dead, and accept God's way and will instead of my own. Looking back now, I see that I again failed; for I by no means "paid unto the Most High my vow." In my [R1481 : page 376] case the words of Paul seem to be fulfilled: "If a man strive for the masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." Surely I have been striving, but, considering the effects, it had brought me almost to despair and made me look with dread to meet the Lord instead of with joy and confidence. I must have been striving unlawfully.

I almost believe that, as you state in your letter, it is "pride and self-will" that have made the wall that separates between God and me. Your kind letter throws some light on my trouble, showing me just why I could not "enter into his rest." How highly I prize those promises made to the "*meek* and *lowly* of heart." I now realize that God shows favor only to the humble, and see that I could not claim his promises for the very reason that he has not made any promises to such as I have been. "Oh, to be nothing, nothing," shall henceforth be my prayer. How very thankful I feel towards you for pointing out to me just where I failed. Sorry that you no sooner dared to put me on my guard: it would have saved me many a tear. I am glad to know that you remember me in prayer, and especially that you prayed for me even before I wrote you of my wretched condition of heart. It was perhaps your

prayers on my behalf that helped me to overcome my pride to the extent of this confession.

While I always felt humble before God, it had seemed impossible for me to be humble before fellow men. None but myself knows how great a struggle it was for me to write to you in the way I did. Even after the letter was written I hesitated to send it, but I now feel that to overcome even in so small a matter as this brings a certain amount of blessing. I feel much more free to write this letter than the former one, because I ignored my own will, and contrary to my own inclination humbled myself, no matter what the opinion of others might be. I shall once more start out, relying upon God's help to overcome that which hinders me from entering into rest. I have just opened my heart before you that you might be better able to judge just why it was impossible to overcome. Any advice will be gratefully accepted. I feel fearful and beclouded, because of my previous failures to overcome.

I clearly see that if I do not overcome I can never fall back on a restitution; for I have in the past made a definite consecration of all human hopes and aims, and of human rights and privileges. Nor do I desire to go back; for I know what it is to be in harmony with God. I know something of the joy and peace which I once had. If I had not had a taste of it, I would not now know of what I was void. **[R1482 : page 376]**

Another trouble with me, I think, is that I am not filled with the Spirit of love. If I were I should have no trouble in overcoming. "To will is present, but how to perform I find not:" this seems to be my experience continually. Can you wonder that I feel distressed and helpless when I look at myself in the light of the past, feeling that I was never able fully to carry out my consecration. How much more imperfect must have been my effort before God? I feel really unworthy to be a worker in this "harvest." I am condemned when speaking about the truth. I hear

continually the reproof of our Lord to those devils which said that they knew he was the Son of God, but our Lord forbade them. This shows clearly to me that he wants only such as are truly his. I lack all evidence now that I am his. I speak to others about this "rest," but I am myself unable to enter. Oh, that the Lord once more would show mercy to me!

I will now conclude this report, whereof a mere nominal Christian should be ashamed, but how much more I, who claim to have come out from among them into higher light. Pray earnestly with me for complete deliverance.

I remain sincerely yours, trusting in the precious blood of Christ as the only hope,

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The above letter was answered and the following came quickly: –

Dear Brother Russell: – Yours of the 24th inst. received. Your letter sounds very hopeful, and would perhaps six months ago have filled me with joy, but now it only increases my sorrow. After reading it carefully I looked up all the passages in the Bible to which you alluded, to see whether there was such hope for me or not. The passage in 1 John 1:7, which you show me to mean that Christ not only justifies us from past sins, but that he also justifies us from our daily short-comings, reads to me very different. I wish I could make it read so. To me it reads: If you *walk* in the light, *then* you have fellowship, and *then* the blood of Christ cleanses you from all sin. Can I, under those limitations, claim that promise? Have I walked in the light? If I had, I would not now need to ask you which be the first principles – how to obtain peace with God – which every one ought to know. The Apostle (1 John 4:4) says: "Ye are of God,

and *have* overcome." It is clear to be seen from such limitations that my case could not be covered.

You also quote, from Psalm 103, that God has mercy upon *all* who come to him. But here he also limits it to a certain class (verse 18), to which I can not belong, however much I may [R1482 : page 377] desire it. I have never kept my covenant with God (even when I tried hard) to my own satisfaction – how much less to God's pleasing.

Next you quote Heb. 4:15. This of course shows that our dear Lord can sympathize with us in temptation, but whether he can or will sympathize with us after we have *yielded* to it I can not see in that text. I would need a high priest who could sympathize with one who has given way to temptation. The next text, 1 John 2:1, gives me some little hope, but so very slight that I scarcely dare trust in it, because the context seems to show that the sins referred to are not the kind that I have reference to – pride and self-will.

It appears to me that the Scriptures teach that after we have once accepted Christ as our justification we must walk in the increasing light, and that as soon as anything is revealed in us being contrary to God's will we must at once put it away. If we would continue to go on in that way, putting evil away just as quickly as it is brought to our attention, we would never live in any conscious sin: and consequently all those promises of forgiveness of our faults unknown to us would be verified. We would even then continually need the blood of Christ to cleanse us from the sins which we commit from lack of knowledge. My trouble is that even after I see my faults I cannot rid myself of them and get into harmony with God's will.

I shall rejoice if I ever succeed in living up to the best of my knowledge. To this end I have been praying for the last month, but all effort seems vain. I have never before felt the depravity of

my nature so fully as for this last month. Before, I always knew it as a theory; but still I had thought that we could bring ourselves into subjection to God's will if we only tried. After examining the Bible closely, I awoke to the fact that *I myself* was altogether out of harmony with God's will. My first thought was to secure his forgiveness for my great error, and to get into harmony with his will. When I began the study of God's will, I verily thought I could learn his will from the Bible, and then do it. But the result of this was to lead me into greater despair, for I found myself unable to do his will. I had never seen the greatness of God's will as I now see it, and I never saw so fully that *I* am as a worm which has nothing at all of which to glory. I had heretofore thought I was some one, and could do so and so, but now I see that I am a slave to self and can do nothing, not even carry out my own desires when I have no one with me to hinder me.

I feel no nearer to God now than I did when I first wrote to you about my trouble: it rather gets darker all the time. Oh, I do feel wretched! I feel just as if I had been a deceiver because I pretended before the Brethren and Sisters with whom I met to have the same joy and peace which they had, when in reality I felt far from God. In their presence (if I was called on to pray) I would address God from their standpoint and thank him for things which I myself did not realize. Perhaps a few hours later I would address God privately, in my closet, and tell him how much I was in need of those things, for which a few hours before I had publicly thanked him, as if I possessed them. How abominable my course must have been to the Lord! No wonder he has abandoned me from having communion with him. The more I think of the past the worse I feel about it.

Until lately I never thought of its being wrong, and asked God to give me rest, when in reality I was in my own way, and therefore could not receive it. I never really knew what was the cause of my not "entering into his rest," until my distress was so

great that I thought of writing to you about it. I shall ever be thankful to you for pointing out to me that my own pride was in the way of receiving God's blessing. I have at last so far learned from my brief experience to humble myself under the mighty hand of God.

No longer do I feel *self-sufficient* nor, as you expressed it in your first letter, that I "know it all." Continue to pray for me: it may be the Lord will yet in mercy remember me again, and give peace to my soul. Let me hear from you soon. Correct me if you find that this is not the way to find peace.

Yours in Christ,

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Poor heart! it was indeed in a wretched plight. But those are valuable lessons for all to learn – of the deceitfulness of our own hearts and of our inability to commend ourselves to God; and happy are those who can learn them from the Word of the Lord so as not to require to experience them thus.

Still longing for God, the Colporteur came to us several hundred miles, for further counsel and assistance in seeking that peace which is beyond all price, which the world can neither give nor take away, but which each can so easily forfeit for himself by disobedience to the voice of our Shepherd.

In personal conference we pointed out the necessity for honesty with the Lord, how pride and self-will are the deadliest foes of all who have consecrated themselves wholly to the Lord. [R1482 : page 378] This brought forth a confession of how the darkness seemed to get into the troubled heart – *about as follows*: –

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The Lord graciously blessed us in pointing out to the troubled one the way of peace. We pointed out that while the sin was great, the [R1483 : page 378] confession showed that, though it was a sin worthy of stripes, it had features which clearly showed that it was not the sin unto death, of which the Apostle warns us (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31); for now, under full knowledge, the sin is not continued as a sweet morsel, but is despised and

confessed and abandoned. We showed that the measure of wilfulness had already had stripes – divine disfellowship – that a portion of the sin can clearly be traced to Adamic weakness, and that this portion therefore is forgivable through the merit of our Great Redeemer's sacrifice – made once for all the race, and for all sins and weaknesses entailed upon us directly or indirectly as children of Adam. We pointed out that not only the ambitious pride was in part an inherited weakness, but the weaknesses of others which served as a temptation was also a result of the fall; and that it is because we cannot do perfectly what we learn of God's perfect Law that we need a compassionate High Priest and an abundant sin-sacrifice, and that we have such a sacrifice and such a High Priest – Jesus our Lord and Redeemer, by whose stripes we are healed.

The realization of his own helplessness clinched this Scriptural argument, and Jesus was seen as our Savior, in a grander, completer sense than ever before; God's favor was gratefully accepted and we knelt and thanked the Lord for the light (he promising thenceforth to walk in it, and to confess the error as publicly as it had been committed); giving thanks for the leading of his providence which had recovered a straying sheep when it had realized its lost condition, and cried out again for a place in the fold. And, above all, we thanked him for the lengths and breadths of the loving provision made for covering all our sins and weaknesses when fully acknowledged, repented of and forsaken; and there the covenant of *full* consecration, even the giving up of self-will and self-pride, was renewed. Thus the troubled one *began* to enter into REST. That same (Sunday) evening the opportunity was embraced for confessing publicly to the Church at Allegheny the error, the darkness which had followed, the humiliating route back to God and [R1483 : page 379] peace, the forgiveness, the returned peace of God's favor, and the determination that henceforth, while continuing to offer himself a sacrifice in God's service, *obedience*, which is still

more acceptable to God, should have first attention. It was also stated that hereafter, instead of feeling more benevolent than God and the apostles toward those in error, the effort would be to take *their* prescribed course, rejecting hereafter all teaching, oral or printed, that does not rest squarely upon the *ransom-price* given and finished at Calvary, obeying the injunctions of the apostle, that if any bring another gospel, to receive it not, and to have *no fellowship* with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to *reprove them*; for he that biddeth God-speed to an evil doer, an evil teacher or an evil doctrine is a partaker in the evil.

So far from despising the Colporteur, we all loved and esteemed him more than ever; for it is only a true and noble soldier of the cross who can thus shatter the idol of his own pride and self-will, and lift up the royal banner of his Redeemer. He has since returned to his field of labor and made similar confession to those whose faith and rest he once endangered, and he is now rejoicing in the peace of God which passeth worldly understanding.

This report has been seen by him and approved before publication, and is published as a testimony of God's forgiving love, and that it may help in bearing up the "feet" of the body of Christ – lest any should stumble utterly over the stumbling-stone, the ransom, and that all might be planted the more securely thereon.
