

Chapter 24 - Obeying His Commandments

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." -

JOHN 15:10.

How clearly we are taught here the place which good works are to occupy in the life of the believer! Christ as the beloved Son was in the Father's love. He kept His commandments, and so He abode in the love. So the believer, without works, receives Christ and is in Him; he keeps the commandments, and so abides in the love. When the sinner, in coming to Christ, seeks to prepare himself by works, the voice of the Gospel sounds, "Not of works." When once in Christ, lest the flesh should abuse the word, "Not of works," the Gospel lifts its voice as loud: "Created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (see Eph.2:9,10). To the sinner out of Christ, works may be his greatest hindrance, keeping him from the union with the Saviour. To the believer in Christ, works are strength and blessing, for by them faith is made perfect (Jas.2:22), the union with Christ is cemented, and the soul established and more deeply rooted in the love of God. "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him." "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love."

The connection between this keeping the commandments and the abiding in Christ's love is easily understood. Our union with Jesus Christ is not a thing of the intellect or sentiment, but a real vital union in heart and life. The holy life of Jesus, with His feelings and disposition, is breathed into us by the Holy Spirit. The believer's calling is to think and feel and will just what Jesus thought and felt and willed. He desires to be partaker not only of the grace but also of the holiness of His Lord; or rather, he sees that holiness is the chief beauty of grace. To live the life of Christ means to him to be delivered from the life of self; the will of Christ is to him the only path of liberty from the slavery of his own evil self-will.

To the ignorant or slothful believer there is a great difference between the promises and commands of Scripture. The former he counts his comfort and his food; but to him who is really seeking to abide in Christ's love, the commands become no less precious, As much as the promises they are the revelation of the divine love, guides into the deeper experience of the divine life, blessed helpers in the path to a closer union with the Lord. He sees how the harmony of our will with His will is one of the chief elements of our fellowship with Him. The will is the central faculty in the Divine as in the human being. The will of God is the power that rules the whole moral as well as the natural world. How could there be fellowship with Him without delight in His will? It is only as long as salvation is to the sinner nothing but a personal safety, that he can be careless or afraid of the doing of God's will. No sooner is it to him what Scripture and the Holy Spirit reveal it to be--the restoration to communion with God and conformity to Him--than he feels that there is no law more natural or more beautiful than this: Keeping Christ's commandments the way to abide in Christ's love. His inmost soul approves when he hears the beloved Lord make the larger measure of the Spirit, with the manifestation of the Father and the Son in the believer, entirely dependent upon the keeping of His commandments (John 14:15,16,21,23).

There is another thing that opens to him a deeper insight and Secures a still more cordial acceptance of this truth. It is this, that in no other way did Christ Himself

abide in the Father's love. In the life which Christ led upon earth, obedience was a solemn reality. The dark and awful power that led man to revolt from his God, came upon Him too, to tempt Him. To Him as man its offers of self-gratification were not matters of indifference; to refuse them, He had to fast and pray. He suffered, being tempted. He spoke very distinctly of not seeking to do His own will, as a surrender He had continually to make. He made the keeping of the Father's commandments the distinct object of His life, and so abode in His love. Does He not tell us, "I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things. And He that sent me is with me; He hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to Him." He thus opened to us the only path to the blessedness of a life on earth in the love of heaven; and when, as from our vine, His Spirit flows in the branches, this keeping the commands is one of the surest and highest elements of the life He inspires.

Believer! would you abide in Jesus, be very careful to keep His commandments. Keep them in the love of your heart. Be not content to have them in the Bible for reference, but have them transferred by careful study, by meditation and by prayer, by a loving acceptance, by the Spirit's teaching, to the fleshy tables of the heart. Be not content with the knowledge of some of the commands, those most commonly received among Christians, while others lie unknown and neglected. Surely, with your New Covenant privileges, you would not be behind the Old Testament saints who spoke so fervently: "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right." Be assured that there is still much of your Lord's will that you do not yet understand. Make Paul's prayer for the Colossians yours for yourself and all believers, "that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"; and that of wrestling Epaphras, "that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." Remember that this is one of the great elements of spiritual growth--a deeper insight into the will of God concerning you. Imagine not that entire consecration is the end--it is only the beginning--of the truly holy life. See how Paul, after having (Rom. 12:1) taught believers to lay themselves upon the altar, whole and holy burnt-offerings to their God, at once proceeds (ver. 2) to tell them what the true--altar-life is: being ever more and more "renewed in their mind to prove what is the good and perfect and acceptable will of God." The progressive renewal of the Holy Spirit leads to growing like-mindedness to Christ; then comes a delicate power of spiritual perception--a holy instinct--by which the soul "quick of understanding (marg. quick of scent) in the fear of the Lord," knows to recognise the meaning and the application of the Lord's commands to daily life in a way that remains hidden to the ordinary Christian. Keep them dwelling richly within you, hide them within your heart, and you shall taste the blessedness of the man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night." Love will assimilate into your inmost being the commands as food from heaven. They will no longer come to you as a law standing outside and against you, but as the living power which has transformed your will into perfect harmony with all your Lord requires. And keep them in the obedience of your life. It has been your solemn vow--has it not?--no longer to tolerate even a single sin: "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep Thy righteous judgments." Labour earnestly in prayer to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Ask earnestly for the discovery of every secret sin--of anything that is not in perfect harmony with the will of God. Walk up to the light you have faithfully and tenderly, yielding yourself in an unreserved surrender to obey all that the

Lord has spoken. When Israel took that vow (Exodus 19:8, 24:7), it was only to break it all too soon. The New Covenant gives the grace to make the vow and to keep it too (Jer.31). Be careful of disobedience even in little things. Disobedience dulls the conscience, darkens the soul, deadens our spiritual energies--therefore keep the commandments of Christ with implicit obedience. Be a soldier that asks for nothing but the orders of the commander.

And if even for a moment the commandments appear grievous, just remember whose they are. They are the commandments of Him who loves you. They are all love, they come from His love, they lead to His love. Each new surrender to keep the commandments, each new sacrifice in keeping them, leads to deeper union with the will, the spirit, and the love of the Saviour. The double recompense of reward shall be yours--a fuller entrance into the mystery of His love--a fuller conformity to His own blessed life. And you shall learn to prize these words as among your choicest treasures: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, EVEN AS I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love."