

Faith and Obedience

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver"—2 Cor. 9:7

IN ALL of God's dealings with man, it must be evident to a careful reader of His Word, that freewill is the basis of His requirements. This principle began in Eden when man was placed in the garden to dress it, and keep it. The only prohibitory decree under which he was to serve is revealed in Gen. 2:16-17—

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Although he was forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was not *compelled* to avoid it. Therefore he possessed the power to obey, or not to obey as he should think best, and on that basis whatever action he should take would be his own voluntary will.

In the exercise of that free will, he chose to disobey God's law by not believing His Word: choosing rather to believe a lie, and thereby sinned. If anyone should think that he can break God's law with impunity, let him give attention to Paul in Rom. 5:12—

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned" (Margin).

We are not guilty of Adam's sin, as some teach, but we do suffer the consequences of it. This is a principle that stands out in the Bible, and we will do well to consider it. In the case of Achan, he not only lost his life, but his family as well, and the armies of Israel were defeated at Ai, and 36 men lost their lives.

Another striking case is that of David when he numbered Israel and, as a result, there was great loss of life among the people. After it was too late, David realized the great suffering brought upon others because he sinned, and said—

"Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let Thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father's house"—2 Sam. 24:17.

The point we are aiming at is this. As we said above, we possess the power to obey, or not to obey as we think best. When an occasion arises, and we find it necessary to make a decision with respect to some condition in the ecclesia, let us, in the exercise of our freewill, examine our position to be certain that whatever we do will be for the welfare of the Truth, and likewise for the welfare of our brethren and sisters.

When the children of Israel were called upon to construct the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the materials for the Tabernacle, and its furnishings, were all to be supplied on a freewill basis, as we read in Exo. 25:2—

"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering."

It should be observed carefully that *the materials were only to be received from those who gave them willingly with their heart*; there was to be no persuasion, or prompting; neither was there to be any canvassing to see which each one would give. Paul emphasizes this same principle—

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity (that is of constraint or compulsion): for God loveth a cheerful giver."

The principle of freewill which began in Eden runs through the entire Bible, and finally finds its fullest development in the Gospel dispensation, and is expressed by Jesus in his last message to the ecclesias, in Rev. 22:17—

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will (be willing), let him take the water of life freely."

The presentation of the Gospel message given to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," was not a conscription law, but a gracious invitation in which they were offered salvation if they would believe and obey the Gospel message. One of the lofty expressions used by Jesus, during his ministry, is that in Matt. 11:28-29—

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

But only a few responded to his appeal, while the majority scorned his message. They had the power to accept the offer, or reject it as they thought best. Using their freewill, they chose to reject the gracious invitation and, because of that, the way of salvation was opened to the Gentiles.

Likewise, only a few among the Gentiles have accepted the invitation, obeyed the Gospel requirements, and began walking in a newness of life.

Even after we have been baptized into Christ, and become heirs according to the promise, we are only on probation, and we are not compelled to walk in the Truth. We still have the freedom of exercising our own voluntary will, and may walk faithfully or unfaithfully, just as we may choose. Of course, the voice of wisdom calls to us saying—

"This is the way, walk ye in it."

And then we have certain specific commandments as—

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

"Walk in love."

"Walk as children of light."

And finally, John says—

"This is love, that ye walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it"—2 John 6.

The manner in which we respond to these words of John will be governed entirely by our own voluntary will. If we fully realize the priceless value of the precious heritage that is ours through our belief and obedience of the glorious Gospel, we will seriously consider every move we make, and do all in our power to place ourselves in harmony with the requirements of the Truth.

The generation that came out of Egypt failed to realize the love and service that the law was calculated and designed to produce in their lives and, as a result, they perished in the wilderness. Commenting on these things, Paul says—

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"

(Heb. 4:1).

If therefore we would profit by the Word preached, it must be mixed with faith when we hear it. If it is, we will develop within ourselves a state of holiness in agreement with the requirements of the Gospel.

God's commandments are simple and easy to be understood, and we must act upon them, or we will never be saved. And we must act now, for the present is all important to us, for we know not the day of the Lord's coming; but we do know that it is not very far from every one of us.

When the Lord comes, and we are summoned to meet him, there will only be one apprehension, and all the worries and anxieties of our days of probation will recede into the past. That which will occupy our minds will be a burning question: what will he think of us? But why wait until then? Owing to the prevalent uncertainty of this life, our whole aim should daily be, What does he think of me *now*? The basis of his judgment is found in his own words—

"I will give to every one according as your work shall be."

How, then, are we exercising our own voluntary will, both with respect to ourselves, and in the ecclesia? Do we remember the commandment, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Do we remember to be gentle, meek, kind-hearted, compassionate, merciful and forgiving?

There is one saying of Jesus, in particular, that should burn in our minds continually. In the parable of the king who would take account of his servants, he speaks of the punishment meted out to the wicked servant, and says—

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:35).

Whether we will be in the Kingdom or not, depends entirely how we conduct ourselves today. Therefore let us put away all petty grievances, and turn to the Word with all our hearts that (Col. 1:9-10)—

"We might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that we might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

(Taken from November 1961 Berean by Bro. Gibson)
