

DELAYING OBEDIENCE.

To have the understanding enlightened in regard to duty, and the conscience so thoroughly awake as to make one feel uneasy in the neglect of it, and yet to be surrounded with advisers, wearing the name and title of Christians, who are continually urging farther delay, is about as uncomfortable a position as a person of fervent piety needs to be placed in. To rebuke such advisers in the faithfulness of the gospel, and yet, at the same time, to behave towards them with becoming meekness, is not the easiest thing in the world. Nevertheless, the idea that we may postpone our obedience to God for a little season, notwithstanding our convictions, is not to be tolerated.

Suppose, for example, that a person becomes convinced, that it is his duty to observe the Sabbath of the Bible—the seventh day of the week. Forthwith he is assailed by his associates with the suggestion, that he ought not to be in a hurry—that he ought to take plenty of time for consideration, at least a year. Plausible as such advice is, we offset it with a simple passage of Scripture. "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies; I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Ps. 119: 59, 60. Here the Psalmist testifies, that he turned his feet to obedience, so soon as, by thinking on his ways, he found that he was walking astray. He made no delay about it; he did not go about to consult the wise men of the nation; he did not examine the writings of the rabbis and doctors, to see if there was not some way of getting round the duty, he *made haste* to render obedience. But, now-a-days, as soon as a person's conscience begins to lash him for neglected duty, he is advised to be very careful about running too hastily. Well, we would not wish one to be *too* hasty; but, on the other hand, it may be well to consider whether there is not such a thing as being *too* tardy. Conviction of duty is not to be trifled with. When anyone does violence to his conviction, he feels that he disobeys God; and such disobedience is sure to be followed by disastrous results. The voice of conscience grows more feeble, and (if the disobedience be persisted in) becomes, at length, hushed in silence. It may continue to reprove with regard to other duties, but with regard to that particular one which has been made the object of willful neglect, it reproves no more. As a necessary consequence, the soul suffers the loss of all those blessings which obedience in that one thing would bring.

Nor is this all. Conscience, having yielded to corruption in one instance, becomes ready to yield in another. Its sternness has been overcome, and it no longer guards the soul with that security which it had been wont to do. It is to the soul what the sense of modesty is to the female; and, as the female cannot allow her sense of delicacy to be trifled with without incurring the risk of a total loss of virtue, so the conscience cannot, in a single instance, be abused, without incurring the danger of becoming "seared with a hot iron." We will not undertake to say, that this is, in every case, the result; but we *do* say, that there is great danger of it. We insist, therefore, that when one understands what is duty, he ought to lose no time in putting it in practice. Let him remember, too, that the wrath of God is revealed against those "who hold the truth in unrighteousness." Rom. 1:18.

But the possibility that one may be mistaken as to his duty, is often urged as a reason for delay. There may be something in this; at least, it seems plausible. Generally, however, this objection is more specious than solid. At all events, it is so with regard to those things which are the subject of direct and unequivocal command. With regard to the Sabbath, we have no hesitation in saying, that it savors of "the wisdom that is earthly." The object of those who urge it is to induce a deference to the views of those who have acquired great skill in explaining away the divine law. But we hold, that however doubtful may be the teachings of Scripture with regard to such questions as are purely doctrinal, or however obscure the language in which its prophecies foretell coming events, with regard to the common, practical duties of life, the Word of God is so plain that there is no need for a child to be mistaken. Were it otherwise, it would be unsuited to the wants of mankind. For, inasmuch as everyone must give account for himself, and not another for him, it is necessary that each one should be able to decide his duty for himself. People of small intellectual capacity must be able to make this decision, as well as those of more expanded powers; and children, as well as those of mature age. Hence duty must be revealed in very simple language. And how simple the language in which our duty to keep holy the Sabbath day is revealed! "*Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy—the seventh day is the Sabbath.*" Who can fail to understand it? What untutored peasant cannot comprehend it? What child does not perceive its meaning? The command to refrain from the adoration of images is not more plain. Yet, when a person of ordinary mental powers is convinced by it, and begins to think about rendering obedience, straightway he is admonished that he does not understand it, and that he would do well to consult some learned men, some spiritual rabbis or doctors of divinity, before taking any decided steps!

And what do the learned doctors say, upon being consulted? Why, that it is the duty of men keep holy the first day of the week. But how do they make it appear? Do they produce any precept from the Scripture, plain and unequivocal, like the fourth commandment? Not by any means. They can present nothing which is level to the comprehension of a child. Whatever they say on the subject, is entirely above the understanding of children, and entirely above the understanding of ignorant people. They talk about the magnitude of redemption, as compared with the work of creation; they have something to say about redemption being finished on the first day of the week, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead; they lay a few such theological propositions together, and finally draw out the inference, that the first day of the week is a holy day. But the plain, ordinary mind, does not understand this. The child fails to

comprehend it. It is true, he hardly dares to indulge the thought that learned men may be mistaken; nevertheless, he is puzzled, extremely puzzled, to understand it. Is not this conclusive proof, that no such duty is enjoined in the Book of God?

We cannot, therefore, subscribe to the idea, that a person must, in reference to the Sabbath, or in reference to any other plain command of Heaven, wait to consult friends, and learned teachers, and the writings of fallible men, before rendering obedience. If God has spoken, "see that ye refuse not him that speaketh." We do not believe that any one can begin to obey God too soon.

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