

THE BIBLE *versus* EXPEDIENCY

Adapted from C.H. Mackintosh

Some, we are aware, would fain persuade us that things are so totally changed since the Bible was penned, that we need other guidance than that which its precious pages supply. They tell us that society is not what it was; that the human race has made progress; that there has been such a development of the powers of nature, the resources of science and the appliances of philosophy, that to maintain the sufficiency and supremacy of the Bible, at such a point in the world's history ... can only be regarded as childishness, ignorance, or imbecility.

Now, the men that tell us these things may be very clever and very learned; but we have no hesitation whatever in telling them that, in this matter, "they do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." We certainly do desire to render all due respect to learning, genius, and talent, whenever we find them in their right place, and at their proper work; but when we find them lifting their proud heads above the Word of God; when we find them sitting in judgement, and casting a slur upon that peerless revelation, we feel that we owe them no respect whatever; yea, we treat them as so many agents of the devil, in his efforts to shake those eternal pillars on which the faith of God's people has ever rested. We cannot listen for a moment to men, however profound in their reading and thinking, who dare to treat God's book as though it were man's book, and speak of those pages that were penned by the All-wise, Almighty, and Eternal God, as though they were the production of a shallow and short-sighted mortal.

Expediency

There is a very ensnaring and dangerous resource presented by the enemy of the Bible, and alas! accepted by too many of the people of God, and that is expediency, or the very attractive plea of doing all the good we can, without due attention to the way in which that good is done. The tree of expediency is a wide-spreading one, and yields most tempting clusters. But remember, its clusters will prove bitter as wormwood in the ends. It is, no doubt, well to do all the good we can; but let us look well to the way in which we do it. Let us not deceive ourselves by the vain imagination that God will ever accept of services based upon positive disobedience to His Word. "It is a gift," said the elders, as they boldly walked over the plain commandment of God, as if He would be pleased with a gift presented on such a principle. There is an intimate connection between the ancient "corban" and the modern "expediency," for "there is nothing new under the sun." The solemn responsibility of obeying the Word of God was got rid of under the plausible pretext of "corban," or "it is a gift (Mark 7:7-13). Thus it was of old. The "corban" of the ancients justified, or sought to justify, many a bold transgression of the law of God; and the "expediency" of our times allures many to outstep the boundary line laid down by divine revelation.

Attractive

Now, we quite admit that expediency holds out most attractive inducements. It does seem so very delightful to be doing a great deal of good, to be gaining the ends of a large hearted benevolence, to be reaching tangible results. It would not be an easy matter duly to estimate the ensnaring influences of such objects, or the immense difficulty of throwing them overboard. Have we never been tempted as we stood upon the narrow path of obedience, and looked forth upon the golden

fields of expediency lying on either side, to exclaim, "Alas! I am sacrificing my usefulness for an idea"? Doubtless; but then what if it should turn out that we have the very same foundation for that "idea" as for the fundamental doctrines of salvation? The question is, What is the idea? Is it founded upon "Thus saith the Lord"? If so, let us tenaciously hold by it, though ten thousand advocates of expediency were hurling at us the grievous charge of narrow-mindedness.

Power

There is immense power in Samuel's brief but pointed reply to Saul, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord! Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). Saul's word was "Sacrifice." Samuel's word was "Obedience." No doubt the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen were most exciting. They would be looked upon as substantial proofs that something was being done; while on the other hand, the path of obedience seemed narrow, silent, lonely, and fruitless. But oh! those pungent words of Samuel! "to obey is better than sacrifice." What a triumphant answer to the most eloquent advocates of expediency! They are most conclusive — most commanding words. They teach us that it is better, if it must be so, to stand, like a marble statue, on the pathway of obedience, than to reach the most desirable ends by transgressing a plain precept of the Word of God.

Services

But let none suppose that one must be like a statue on the path of obedience. Far from it. There are rare and precious services to be rendered by the obedient one — services which can only be rendered by such, and which owe all their preciousness to their being the fruit of simple obedience. What a pattern of this we have in our blessed Lord! - who for thirty years lived here in retirement, known by men only as "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3), but known by, and the delight of, the Father, as the Holy One of God. True, they may not find a place in the public record of man's bustling activity; but they are recorded on high, and they will be published at the right time. As a dear friend has often said to us, "Heaven will be the safest and happiest place to hear all about our work down here."

Simplicity

May we remember this, and pursue our way, in all simplicity, looking to Christ for guidance, power, and blessing. May His smile be enough for us. May we not be found looking askance to catch the approving look of a poor mortal whose breath is in his nostrils, nor sigh to find our names amid the glittering record of the great men of the age. The servant of Christ should look far beyond all such things. The grand business of the servant is to obey. His object should not be to do a great deal, but simply to do what he is told. This makes all plain; and, moreover, it will make the Bible precious as the depository of the Master's will, to which he must continually betake himself to know what he is to do, and how he is to do it. Neither tradition nor expediency will do for the servant of Christ. The all-important inquiry is, "What saith the Scriptures."

This settles everything. From the decision of the Word of God there must be no appeal. When God speaks man must bow. It is not by any means a question of obstinate adherence to a man's own notions. Quite the opposite. It is a reverent adherence to the Word of God. Let the reader distinctly mark this. It often happens that, when one is determined, through grace, to abide by Scripture, he will be pronounced dogmatic, intolerant and imperious; and, no doubt, one has to watch over his temper, spirit, and style, even when seeking to abide by the Word of God. But, be

it well remembered, obedience to Christ's commandments is the very opposite of imperiousness, dogmatism, and intolerance. It is not a little strange that when a man tamely consents to place his conscience in the keeping of his fellow, and to bow down his understanding to the opinions of men, he is considered meek, modest, and liberal; but let him reverently bow to the authority of the holy Scripture, and he will be looked upon as self-confident, dogmatic, and narrow-minded. Be it so. The time is rapidly approaching when obedience shall be called by its right name, and meet its recognition and reward. For that moment the faithful must be content to wait, and while waiting for it, be satisfied to let men call them whatever they please. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity."

Duty

We feel that we have a solemn duty to perform, at a moment like the present, in the which superstition, expediency, and rationalism are all at work, as so many agents of the devil, in his efforts to sap the foundations of our holy faith. We owe it to that blessed volume of inspiration, from which we have drunk the streams of life and peace, to bear our feeble testimony to the divinity of its every page, and our conviction of its divine sufficiency for every need, whether of the believer individually, or the church collectively. We press upon our readers earnestly to set a higher value than ever upon the Holy Scriptures, and to warn them, in most urgent terms, against every influence, particularly expediency, which tends to shake their confidence in those heavenly oracles. There is a spirit abroad, and there are principles at work, which make it imperative upon us to keep close to Scripture — to treasure it in our hearts — and to submit to its holy authority.

May God the Spirit, the Author of the Bible, produce, in the writer and reader of these lines, a more ardent love for that Bible! May He enlarge our experimental acquaintance with its contents, and lead us into more complete subjection to its teachings in all things, that God may be more glorified in us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.