

OBEDIENCE

PRESENTED BY

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GREEN LAWN CHURCH OF CHRIST

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WE ARE SPEAKING TONIGHT ON THE SUBJECT "OBEDIENCE." IT MAY BE SUGGESTED THAT SUCH A SUBJECT IS SURELY INAPPROPRIATE FOR DISCUSSION IN CONGREGATIONS OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST FOR WE HAVE PREACHED SO VERY MUCH ON THE SUBJECT OF OBEDIENCE. INDEED, IT MAY EVEN BE SUGGESTED THAT SUCH SERMONS ARE OUR "LONG SUIT." BUT YET THERE IS ALWAYS THE DANGER THAT THROUGH MISUNDERSTANDING OUR "LONGEST SUIT" MAY BECOME OUR GREATEST SHORTCOMING, AND I AM RATHER CONSTRAINED TO BELIEVE THAT IN MANY INSTANCES WE DO MISUNDERSTAND THAT WHICH CONSTITUTES TRUE OBEDIENCE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. MANY SERMONS HAVE BEEN PREACHED ON THE SUBJECT AND THE GENERAL CONCLUSION IS THAT ACCEPTABLE OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS DOING WHAT GOD SAYS IN THE WAY THAT HE SAYS IT, NOT ADDING ANYTHING NOR TAKING ANYTHING AWAY. I CERTAINLY BELIEVE THAT WE SHALL SEE IN THE COURSE OF THE LESSON THAT THIS IS A PART OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD. YET, A PARTIAL DEFINITION IS SOMETIMES A MISLEADING DEFINITION, AND I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ONE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT THAT IS MISSING FROM THE DEFINITION I GAVE YOU.

CERTAINLY THERE IS NO DISAGREEMENT AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE. FOR INSTANCE IN 1 JOHN 5:2,3 WE READ, "BY THIS WE KNOW THAT WE LOVE THE CHILDREN OF GOD, WHEN WE LOVE GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. FOR THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD, THAT WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS; AND HIS COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT GRIEVOUS." AND THEN AGAIN IN HEBREWS 5:8,9, "THOUGH HE WERE A SON, YET LEARNED HE OBEDIENCE BY THE THINGS WHICH HE SUFFERED; AND BEING MADE PERFECT, HE BECAME THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL SALVATION UNTO ALL THEM THAT OBEY HIM." WE COULD READ MANY VERSES BESIDES THESE TWO PASSAGES BUT THEY WOULD MERELY EMPHASIZE THE TRUTHS THAT THESE HAVE SET FORTH. OBEDIENCE IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN MAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

BUT AGAIN WE ASK THE QUESTION, "WHAT IS OBEDIENCE?" IF YOU WERE TO TURN TO OUR ENGLISH DICTIONARY YOU WOULD FIND THAT WEBSTER DEFINES THE TERM "OBEY" AS "TO BE OBEDIENT, EXECUTE THE COMMANDS OF, ALSO TO EXECUTE AS AN ORDER." THE OXFORD UNIVERSAL ENGLISH DICTIONARY DEFINES "OBEY" AS "TO COMPLY WITH, PERFORM A COMMAND, ETC." THESE DEFINITIONS ARE OUR USUAL CONCEPT OF OBEDIENCE AND WHILE THIS IS CERTAINLY AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF OBEDIENCE, THERE IS ANOTHER PORTION OF THE BIBLE'S DEFINITION OF OBEDIENCE THAT, IF IT IS MISSING, REALLY RENDERS WHAT A MAN MAY DO IN FOLLOWING TO THE LETTER THE DIRECTIONS AND THE COMMANDS OF GOD, DISOBEDIENCE. SO OUR QUESTION THEN IS, "WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES OBEDIENCE ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD?" INDEED, WHAT IS THIS FACTOR THAT IS ESSENTIAL TO CONSTITUTE WHAT MAN DOES OBEDIENCE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

I BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR MAN TO DO JUST EXACTLY WHAT GOD COMMANDS AS FAR AS THE ACT IS CONCERNED AND YET BE DISOBEDIENT. TAKE FOR ILLUSTRATION THE PARABLE THAT JESUS TOLD AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. WE REFER TO IT AS THE PARABLE OF THE TWO BUILDERS-- THE WISE BUILDER AND THE FOOLISH BUILDER. IN READING THIS PARABLE WE REMEMBER VERY CLEARLY THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS WHEN HE SAID THAT THE WISE BUILDER IS THE MAN THAT HEARETH THESE THINGS OF MINE AND DOETH THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND THE FOOLISH BUILDER IS THAT MAN THAT HEARETH THESE SAYINGS OF MINE AND DOETH THEM NOT. NOW I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY TIMES WE HAVE READ AND STUDIED AND DISCUSSED THIS PARTICULAR PARABLE AND WE HAVE SAID, "NOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO BUILDERS IS THAT ONE DID AND ONE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING." BUT IF YOU WILL LOOK AT THE PARABLE YOU WILL SEE THAT THAT IS NOT SO. IN FACT, WE'VE PREACHED A NUMBER OF OTHER SERMONS THAT TOLD US THAT THAT WAS NOT SO, FOR WE HAVE POINTED OUT HOW EACH OF THESE MEN BUILT A BUILDING. WE HAVE POINTED OUT HOW EACH OF THESE MEN DID APPARENTLY THE VERY SAME THING AS FAR AS COULD BE DISCERNED BY THE

HUMAN EYE. WHAT THEN WAS THE DIFFERENCE? THE DIFFERENCE WAS NOT IN THAT ONE DID SOMETHING AND ONE DID NOTHING. THE DIFFERENCE WAS THAT THOUGH THEY BOTH DID SOMETHING THEY DID THEIR SOMETHING UPON DIFFERENT FOUNDATIONS. THEY BEGAN FROM DIFFERENT PLACES. WHAT WAS IT THEN THAT MADE THE WISE BUILDER A WISE MAN AND THE FOOLISH BUILDER A FOOLISH MAN? THE DIFFERENCE WAS THAT THE WISE MAN DID WHAT HE DID IN RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS CHRIST AND THE FOOLISH MAN DID WHAT HE DID BELIEVING THAT HE WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD IF HE JUST PERFORMED A PERFUNCTORY, MECHANICAL DOING OF WHAT GOD HAD SAID TO DO. I THINK IF YOU WILL LOOK AT THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT WHICH IS CONCLUDED BY THIS PARABLE YOU WILL SEE THAT THIS IS THE MAIN DIFFERENCE. ALL THROUGH THIS SERMON WAS NOT JESUS TALKING TO THE PHARISEES WHO WERE DOING THE WILL OF GOD BUT WHO WERE DOING IT TO BE SEEN OF MEN? THEY WERE BUILDING ON THE WRONG FOUNDATION. THEY WERE MEN WHO WERE DOING WHAT GOD HAD SAID TO DO, BUT MEN WHO WERE DOING SO THINKING THAT IN THE DOING THEREOF, AND SIMPLY BECAUSE OF THE DOING THEREOF, THEY WOULD BE JUSTIFIED WITH GOD. I THINK THIS IS FURTHER INDICATED BY THE LANGUAGE WHICH JESUS USED IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THIS PARABLE OF THE TWO BUILDERS, WHEN, BEGINNING IN THE 21ST VERSE HE SAID, "NOT EVERYONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME LORD, LORD, SHALL ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD, BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN. MANY WILL SAY UNTO ME IN THAT DAY, LORD, LORD HAVE WE NOT PROPHESIED, HAVE WE NOT CAST OUT DEMONS, HAVE WE NOT DONE MANY WONDERFUL WORKS IN THY NAME? YET WILL I SAY UNTO THEM, DEPART FROM ME YE THAT DO INIQUITY, I NEVER KNEW YOU." NOW WE HAVE SAID THAT THESE MEN TO WHOM JESUS WAS SPEAKING THERE NEVER DID ANYTHING AT ALL. BUT IF YOU WILL READ THE LANGUAGE CAREFULLY, YOU WILL SEE THAT THAT IS NOT SO FOR THEY HAD DONE MANY THINGS. WHERE THEN WAS THEIR INSUFFICIENCY? THEIR INSUFFICIENCY WAS IN THAT THEY DID NOT DO THEM IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN HEAVEN. JESUS WAS TRYING TO TEACH MEN THAT SIMPLY DOING THE ACT WAS NOT NECESSARILY DOING THE WILL OF GOD. I BELIEVE THIS IS A LESSON THAT I NEED TO LEARN AND NEED TO BE CONSTANTLY REMINDED OF AND I BELIEVE MANY OF MY BRETHREN NEED TO BE REMINDED OF IT. DOING THE ACT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT ONE HAS DONE THE WILL OF GOD.

WHAT THEN IS THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT THAT CAN TAKE THE DOING OF THE ACT THAT GOD HAS COMMANDED AND TAKE IT FROM AN AREA OF DISOBEDIENCE, AN AREA WHERE IT IS UNACCEPTABLE, AND MOVE IT OVER INTO AN AREA WHERE GOD WILL ACCEPT IT. I SUBMIT TO YOU THAT THIS INGREDIENT HAS BEEN THE SAME IN GOD'S DEALING WITH MAN FROM THE VERY BEGINNING UNTIL THIS DAY. LET US GO BACK INTO THE PATRIARCHAL AGE. WHILE THE PASSAGE WE ARE READING WAS NOT WRITTEN IN THE PATRIARCHAL AGE, IT REFERS BACK TO ABRAHAM. LET US READ FROM NEHEMIAH 9:7,8, "THOU ART THE LORD THE GOD, WHO DIDST CHOOSE ABRAHAM, AND BROUGHTEST HIM FORTH OUT OF UR OF THE CHALDEES, AND GAVEST HIM THE NAME OF ABRAHAM; AND FOUNDEST HIS HEART FAITHFUL BEFORE THEE." THIS WAS THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE UNDER THE LAW. TURN TO EZRA 7:10. "FOR EZRA HAD PREPARED HIS HEART TO SEEK THE LAW OF THE LORD, AND TO DO IT, AND TO TEACH IN ISRAEL STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS." IT WAS NOT SIMPLY THE DOING OF IT BUT IT WAS THE DOING OF IT IN RELATIONSHIP TO A PARTICULAR ATTITUDE OF HEART THAT MADE EZRA'S ACT ACCEPTABLE. II CHRONICLES 31:20,21. "AND THUS DID HEZEKIAH THROUGHOUT ALL JUDAH, AND WROUGHT THAT WHICH WAS GOOD AND RIGHT AND TRUTH, BEFORE THE LORD HIS GOD, AND IN EVERY WORK THAT HE BEGAN IN THE SERVICE OF THE HOUSE OF GOD, AND IN THE LAW, AND IN THE COMMANDMENTS, TO SEEK HIS GOD, HE DID IT WITH ALL HIS HEART, AND PROSPERED." THE SAME PRINCIPLE IS TRUE IN THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION, ROMANS 6:17,18. "BUT GOD BE THANKED, THAT YE WERE THE SERVANTS OF SIN, BUT YE HAVE OBEYED FROM THE HEART THAT FORM OF DOCTRINE WHICH WAS DELIVERED YOU. BEING THEN MADE FREE FROM SIN, YE BECAME THE SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS." SO OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN, IN EVERY DISPENSATION, IN EVERY AGE, UNDER EVERY LAW WHEREIN GOD HAS DEALT WITH MAN, THAT WHICH HAS CONSTITUTED OBEDIENCE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD IS AN ACT IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD WHICH IS PROMPTED BY THE FULLNESS OF THE HEART. I THINK A GOOD SUMMARY MAY BE FOUND IN I SAMUEL 12:24 AND AGAIN IN I CHRONICLES 28:9. ONLY FEAR THE LORD, AND SERVE HIM IN TRUTH WITH ALL YOUR HEART; FOR CONSIDER HOW GREAT THINGS HE HATH DONE FOR YOU." "AND THOU, SOLOMON MY SON, KNOW THOU THE GOD OF THY FATHER, AND SERVE HIM WITH A PERFECT HEART, AND WITH A WILLING MIND; FOR THE LORD SEARCHETH ALL HEARTS, AND UNDERSTANDETH ALL THE IMAGINATIONS OF THE THOUGHTS." THERE ARE TWO EXPRESSIONS IN THIS LATTER PASSAGE WHICH WE HAVE READ

FROM I CHRONICLES 28:9 WHICH I BELIEVE WILL HELP US IN UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE PERFECT HEART IS. THAT YOU SERVE HIM, DAVID SPEAKING TO SOLOMON, WITH "A PERFECT HEART" AND "WITH A WILLING MIND." IN OTHER WORDS, THAT ATTITUDE OF HEART WHICH CONSTITUTES MAN'S BEING AND HIS DEEDS ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD IS BASED UPON A DISTINCT AND A POSITIVE ACT OF MAN'S WILL. WHEN MAN HAS A WILLING MIND, AND BECAUSE HE WILLS TO SERVE, DOES SERVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, HE THEN HAS WHAT DAVID CALLED "A PERFECT HEART."

BUT NOW HAVING SEEN THAT THERE IS AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT WHICH IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO CONSTITUTE EVEN DOING ACTS THAT GOD HAS COMMANDED ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD, WE NEED TO GO JUST ONE STEP FURTHER, AND THAT STEP IS THIS. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS? ONE OF THE GREATEST DIFFICULTIES IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD IS TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS. IN FACT, A FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THIS RELATIONSHIP IS A CAUSE OF MANY OF THE MAJOR DIVISIONS CREEDWISE, NOT JUST IN OUR DAY, BUT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. MANY OF THE SO-CALLED HERESIES OF HISTORY HAVE BEEN BROUGHT ABOUT BECAUSE OF A BASIC DIFFERENCE IN ATTITUDE AND UNDERSTANDING REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS. WHAT THEN ACCORDING TO THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE IS THE RELATIONSHIP?

SOME WOULD RESPOND BY SAYING THAT WORKS ARE FAITH MADE VISIBLE, BUT I WOULD QUESTION THAT. CAN WE ALWAYS SAY WHENEVER WE SEE WORKS THAT THESE WORKS ARE FAITH MADE VISIBLE? SOMEHOW I DOUBT IT. FOR INSTANCE, IN I JOHN 14:15, WE READ THE SIMPLE STATEMENT, "IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS." WE HAVE ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD IN RELATIONSHIP TO THAT PASSAGE THAT ONE MAY KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS WITHOUT LOVING, BUT ONE CANNOT LOVE WITHOUT KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS. I BELIEVE THE SAME THING IS TRUE AS REGARDS THE STATEMENT WORKS ARE FAITH MADE VISIBLE. I BELIEVE THAT ONE MAY DO THE WORKS WITHOUT THE FAITH, BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT ONE CAN HAVE FAITH WITHOUT THE WORKS. SINCE ONE CAN DO THE WORKS WITHOUT NECESSARILY HAVING THE FAITH, THEN WE CANNOT LAY DOWN A BLANKET RULE AND SAY THAT WORKS ARE ALWAYS MADE VISIBLE. WORKS MAY BE THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH, BUT WORKS MAY ALSO BE DONE WITHOUT THEIR BEING EVIDENCE OF FAITH. SOMEONE ASKS A QUESTION, "WHAT ABOUT JAMES 2:18 WHERE JAMES SAYS, 'LET'S HAVE A CONTEST.' '...SHEW ME THY FAITH WITHOUT THY WORKS, AND I WILL SHEW THEE MY FAITH BY MY WORKS.' WAS NOT JAMES SAYING THAT WORKS ARE FAITH MADE VISIBLE?" I DON'T THINK SO. I DON'T BELIEVE THAT JAMES IS SAYING THAT WORKS ARE ALWAYS EVIDENCE OF FAITH. WHAT JAMES IS SAYING THROUGHOUT THE SECOND CHAPTER IS THAT IF YOU HAVE FAITH, THE ONLY WAY YOU WILL EVER SHOW IT IS BY WHAT YOU DO. HE IS NOT SAYING THAT WHAT YOU DO ALWAYS SHOWS IT BUT HE IS SAYING IF YOU HAVE IT THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN SHOW IT IS THROUGH WHAT YOU DO. WORKS ARE NOT ALWAYS EVIDENCE OF FAITH. IN II KINGS 5:1 WE READ, "NOW NAAMAN, CAPTAIN OF THE HOST OF THE KING OF SYRIA, WAS A GREAT MAN WITH HIS MASTER, AND HONOURABLE, BECAUSE BY HIM THE LORD HAD GIVEN DELIVERANCE UNTO SYRIA." NOW HERE IS A MAN OF WHOM THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, "HE WAS HONOURABLE," BUT HIS HONOR, HIS HONESTY, AND HIS INTEGRITY HAD NO RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOD OF ISRAEL. IT HAD NO RELATIONSHIP TO A FAITH IN THE ONLY TRUE AND LIVING GOD. THEREFORE, HERE IS A WORK WHICH IS CERTAINLY IN KEEPING WITH WHAT GOD WANTS A MAN TO DO. HE WANTS HIM TO BE HONORABLE. HE WANTS HIM TO BE HONEST. HE WANTS HIM TO HAVE INTEGRITY, BUT IN THIS CASE THESE QUALITIES WERE NO EVIDENCE OF FAITH IN THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD. WE LOOK ABOUT US IN OUR WORLD TODAY AND WE NO DOUBT SEE MANY INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE GOOD, MORAL INDIVIDUALS, BUT THEY ARE NOT GOOD, MORAL MEN BECAUSE THEY HAVE FAITH IN GOD. THEY ARE GOOD, MORAL MEN BECAUSE THEY HAVE SOME HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF THEIR BEING AND THEY JUST WANT TO DEAL RIGHTLY WITH THEIR FELLOW MAN. IT IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY FAITH IN GOD. IN FACT, THERE ARE SOME MEN WHO DON'T HAVE ANY FAITH IN GOD WHO MAY BE GOOD, MORAL MEN. THIS SIMPLY SAYS THAT WORKS ARE NOT ALWAYS EVIDENCE OF FAITH.

WORKS MAY BE SAID TO BE FAITH MADE VISIBLE ONLY WHEN YOU ARE SPEAKING OF A PARTICULAR KIND OF WORK. WORKS MAY BE SAID, OBEDIENCE MAY BE SAID TO BE FAITH MADE VISIBLE ONLY WHEN YOU ARE SPEAKING OF A PARTICULAR OBEDIENCE. WHAT KIND OF OBEDIENCE IS THAT? LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY TO ROMANS 16:25,26. "NOW TO HIM THAT IS OF POWER TO STABLISH YOU ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL, AND THE PREACHING OF JESUS CHRIST, ACCORDING TO THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY, WHICH WAS KEPT SECRET SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN, BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST, AND BY THE SCRIPTURES OF THE PROPHETS, ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF THE EVERLASTING GOD, MADE KNOWN TO ALL NATIONS FOR THE OBEEDIENCE OF

FAITH. Now "FAITH" AND "OBEDIENCE OF FAITH" ARE NOT THE SAME THING. OBEDIENCE OF FAITH IS OBEDIENCE THAT FAITH PROMPTS. OBEDIENCE OF FAITH IS OBEDIENCE THAT HAS FAITH AS ITS SOURCE, IT IS OBEDIENCE THAT RESULTS FROM, IT IS OBEDIENCE THAT SPRINGS OUT OF FAITH, AND IT IS JUST HERE THAT MANY WHO TAKE SUCH PRIDE IN THEIR BEING MORALLY GOOD MEN GO BY THE WAYSIDE AND ETERNALLY SO. THEIR OBEDIENCE TO THE MORAL PRECEPTS OF GOD AND JESUS CHRIST HAS ABSOLUTELY NO RELATIONSHIP AT ALL TO FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD. IT IS NOT JUST ANY KIND OF OBEDIENCE THAT IS ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD. IT IS ONLY THAT OBEDIENCE THAT IS PRODUCED BY FAITH.

THIS DISTINCTION BECOMES A GREAT DEAL MORE OBVIOUS WHEN WE LOOK AT CERTAIN ACTS WHICH GOD REQUIRES WHICH CAN AND WILL BE PRODUCED ONLY BY FAITH. THESE ARE ACTS WHICH HAVE NOTHING AT ALL TO COMMEND THEM EXCEPT GOD'S COMMAND. MAN LOOKS AT WHAT GOD HAS COMMANDED AND HE CAN'T SEE ANY REAL REASON FOR DOING IT, BUT HE HAS GOD'S COMMAND AND GOD'S COMMAND COMMENDS IT TO HIM. HE DOESN'T PERFORM THE ACT BECAUSE OF SOME HUMANITARIAN REASON, HE DOESN'T REFRAIN FROM DOING IT BECAUSE IF HE DID IT HE MIGHT BE PUT IN JAIL. HE DOES IT BECAUSE HE HAS GOT FAITH IN GOD. IT IS THESE DEEDS WHICH BECOME IN A PARTICULAR AND IN A PECULIAR WAY THE TEST OF THE REALITY AND THE VALIDITY OF THE FAITH OF MAN. IN HEBREWS 11 WE READ WHAT IS CALLED THE "FAITH CHAPTER OF THE BIBLE," AND YET IT IS A CHAPTER IN WHICH THE VERBS ARE SO VERY IMPORTANT. VERBS ARE WORDS OF DOING, WORDS OF ACTION. SOMETIMES WE GO OVER TO JAMES 2 AND SAY, "HERE IS A CHAPTER WHICH DEALS WITH MAN'S OBEDIENCE." BUT I AM NOT CONVINCED THAT IS SO. THE GREAT LESSON THAT JAMES IS TEACHING IN THE SECOND CHAPTER DOESN'T DEAL WITH WORKS PER SE BUT HE IS TALKING ABOUT THAT REAL FAITH, THAT PERFECT FAITH, THAT COMPLETE FAITH THAT ALWAYS EXPRESSES ITSELF IN THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. BUT LET'S TURN BACK TO THE FAITH CHAPTER. WE HAVE SAID THAT THERE ARE SOMETIMES ACTS WHICH HAVE NOTHING TO COMMEND THEM BUT THE COMMAND OF GOD. I BELIEVE THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF HEBREWS SETS FORTH A SERIES OF MEN WHO HAD THIS KIND OF FAITH. "BY FAITH ABEL OFFERED." WHY DID YOU OFFER, ABEL? WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO COMMEND IT? WHY DO YOU GO OUT TO YOUR FLOCK, ABEL, AND GET THE VERY BEST SHEEP THAT YOU HAVE GOT AND BRING IT UP HERE AND GIVE IT AS A SACRIFICE TO GOD? HUMAN REASON WOULD SAY IF YOU ARE GOING TO DO ANYTHING, GO OUT AND GET THE SICKLY ONES. AND THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED SO MANY, MANY TIMES. BUT FAITH SAYS, "DO WHAT GOD DIRECTED." BY FAITH NOAH BUILT. NOAH, WHY IN THE WORLD DID YOU BUILD AN ARK SO FAR FROM WATER? THERE IS JUST ONE ANSWER—BECAUSE GOD SAID TO, AND WHEN NOAH DID WHAT GOD HAD SAID, GOD WAS ABLE TO SAY, "BY FAITH NOAH BUILT." "BY FAITH, ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS TRIED OFFERED UP ISAAC." ABRAHAM, DON'T YOU KNOW ISAAC IS THE SON OF PROMISE? HAVEN'T YOU STOPPED TO CONSIDER, ABRAHAM THAT IF YOU KILL ISAAC THERE MAY BE NO MORE SONS OF THE PROMISE? BUT YOU SEE WHEN GOD SAID, "OFFER ISAAC," ABRAHAM DIDN'T RATIONALIZE, ABRAHAM DIDN'T TRY TO FIGURE OUT SOMETHING ELSE, ABRAHAM DIDN'T ASK GOD FOR REASONS. "BY FAITH ABRAHAM OFFERED," MARK THE LANGUAGE THAT IS USED OF ABRAHAM AFTER ABRAHAM HAD GONE AS FAR AS GOD COULD PERMIT. "NOW I KNOW THAT THOU FEAREST ME SEEING THAT THOU HAST NOT WITHHELD THY SON THINE ONLY SON FROM ME." GOD BASES HIS KNOWLEDGE OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH, GOD BASES HIS KNOWLEDGE OF ABRAHAM'S REVERENTIAL FEAR NOT ON ANYTHING THAT ABRAHAM HAD SAID, BUT ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE WAS EVIDENCE OF HIS FAITH. IT WAS PROMPTED BY FAITH. ONLY FAITH COULD HAVE PRODUCED IT. IT WAS OBEDIENCE OF FAITH AND IT WAS ACCEPTANCE UNTO GOD. "BY MYSELF," GOD CONTINUES, "HAVE I SWORN FOR BECAUSE THOU HAST DONE THIS THING THAT IN BLESSING I WILL BLESS THEE, AND IN MULTIPLYING I WILL MULTIPLY THY SEED AS THE STARS OF THE HEAVENS AND AS THE SAND IS UPON THE SEASHORE." YOU CAN GO THROUGH THE ENTIRE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THAT CHAPTER AND YOU KEEP COMING UP WITH THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN. GOD'S PEOPLE COMING FACE TO FACE WITH OCCASIONS WHEN THEY WERE ORDERED TO DO THINGS THAT ONLY THE COMMAND OF GOD COULD COMMENT TO THEM. "BY FAITH ISRAEL PASSED THROUGH THE RED SEA." WHAT KIND OF FAITH DID IT TAKE TO MARCH TOWARD A WALL OF WATER? "BY FAITH THE WALLS OF JERICO FELL DOWN AFTER THEY WERE COMPASSED ABOUT." WHAT KIND OF FAITH WOULD IT TAKE TO GO OUT AND MARCH AROUND THE WALLS OF THAT CITY? WITH HUMAN NATURE BEING WHAT IT IS, I'M SURE THE CITIZENS OF JERICO WERE STANDING ON THE RAMPART LAUGHING AND DERIDING THE ISRAELITES. AND IT IS HARD, IT IS HARD TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD. IT IS HARD TO HAVE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH WHEN MEN ARE DERIDING AND SAYING, "WELL, THERE IS NEITHER RHYME NOR REASON FOR THAT." WHEN A MAN HAS FAITH

IN GOD THERE IS ALWAYS RHYME AND THERE IS ALWAYS REASON, AND THE FACT THAT GOD HAS COMMANDED IS REASON ENOUGH TO PROMPT FAITH TO ACT.

THIS IS THE THING THAT MAKES OBEDIENCE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, AND APART FROM THIS OBEDIENCE YOU ARE ON THE SAND. YOU ARE OVER ON THE FOUNDATION THAT IS NOT SURE AND SAFE. YOU ARE THERE UNPROTECTED, TO BE SWEEPED AWAY WHEN THE STORMS OF LIFE AND JUDGMENT COME SWEEPING ROUND ABOUT.

THIS, BRETHREN, IS THE REASON THAT WHEN WE LOOK INTO THE WORD OF GOD, AND WE READ THERE OF MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE GIVEN THEMSELVES ALL THE DAYS OF THEIR LIFE IN OBEDIENCE OF FAITH IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD, GOD DOES NOT LOOK AT THEM AND REMARK ON THEIR OBEDIENCE. BUT THERE IS A PARTICULARLY BEAUTIFUL WORD WHICH SUMMARIZES AND EXPRESSES THE LIFE THAT HAS BEEN LIVED IN OBEDIENCE OF FAITH, "WELL-DONE THOU GOOD AND FAITHEUL SERVANT." ARE YOU FAITHFUL? I AM NOT ASKING YOU IF YOU HAVE DONE THIS OR IF YOU HAVE DONE THAT, FOR AS WE HAVE SEEN, YOU MAY DO THIS AND THAT AND THE OTHER AND STILL NOT BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. I'M ASKING IF YOU'RE DOING THAT WHICH GOD HAS DIRECTED YOU TO DO, HAS BEEN MOTIVATED AND PROMPTED, NOT JUST IN THE BEGINNING, BUT THROUGHOUT THE DAYS OF YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE, BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST. HAS IT BEEN, NOT JUST OBEDIENCE, BUT HAS IT BEEN OBEDIENCE OF FAITH?