

John - Commentaries by Alexander Hume Rule

Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule Volume 1, Obedience to God and Love to the Saints (8:29)

Perfect obedience characterized the life of Christ here on earth. He was ever the dependent One, ever the obedient One. "In the volume of the book" it was written of Him, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). And when on earth, He could say, "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me" (John 5:30). And again, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). This was perfect obedience.

But His path of obedience to the Father was also the perfect exhibition of God's love to man. His words, His ways, His acts, all spoke of God's love to His guilty creatures. And the cross was the full revelation of this, together with the infinitely perfect expression of His obedience to God the Father. In the life of Christ as a man on earth perfect obedience and perfect love were united; and the life in which these were displayed in Christ is the life which, through grace, is imparted to the believer.

In Christ there was no imperfection. His was a life of perfect obedience — perfect love. In us there is much to hinder the manifestation of this life; yet the life in us is the same in its nature, its traits, and its characteristics — it is the same life. And whether in Him or in us, it is characterized by obedience. Obedience is the state in which it subsists. "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3). No matter what our pretension may be, it avails nothing unless there is this obedience. "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

The other characteristic of the divine life is not separated from this. Where there is obedience there will also be love, because they belong to the same life — the same nature. "Whoso keepeth His word" — this is obedience — "in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5). His word is the expression of what He is, of His nature; and "God is love," so that if we keep His word, His love is perfected in us.

But "His commandments" are not only the expression of what He is, but of His authority as well. We are called to obey, and to obey as Christ obeyed. We are sanctified unto the obedience of Christ. And if we say that we abide in Him, we ought also to walk even as He walked; that is, in obedience to God, for His whole life was that. There was not a single movement in His soul, not a single act of His life, that was not obedience to His Father's will. Blessed indeed it is to behold that perfect One in His path of perfect obedience! And happy they who follow His footsteps, who walk even as He walked!

The commandment to obey as Christ obeyed, to walk as Christ walked, was not a "new commandment." It was the word they had heard from the beginning in connection with the manifestation of the divine life in Christ. It was the Father's commandment to Christ, according to Christ's own words: "For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50). So John says the commandment was "old." Again, it was a "new commandment," because true in Him and in us. The commandment was the expression of the divine life — "His commandment is life everlasting," and was first seen in Christ. But now it is true in us too, "because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John 2:8). God had come out through the cross, and the light of life was now shining for man, and dispelling the darkness. This life, for man, and in man, as the fruit of redemption, life in Christ, life in the Spirit, was a new thing. It is Christ in us, Christ as our life. The commandment is "old" because the obedience which characterizes this life was seen in Him which was from the beginning, "the word of life." It is "new" because the same thing is seen in the believer now. If they were seeking something new, according to the Gnostic philosophy, the bane of Christianity in that day, the Apostle John gives them this; but he would not disconnect it from Christ, the believer's life, "that which was from the beginning." "Which thing is true in Him and in you" (1 John 2:8).

Until redemption was accomplished Christ remained alone. Now He is no more alone; we are in Him, and He in us. This is a wonderful truth, and it gives a wonderful character to the children of God. The Holy Spirit in us is the power of it all — the divine answer in us down here to all that Christ is in glory as a man. It is no longer Christ as a man walking alone in this world, but Christ in the saints, and the "eternal life" displayed in them. In John's epistle, Christ is seen as "eternal life" down here in this world, first alone, and then in the saints; "which thing is true in Him and in you." And this life, whether in Christ alone, or in Him and in us, is first an obedient life, and second a life of love.

1 John 2:3-8 is obedience and disobedience.

Verses 9-11 are love and hatred.

Obedience and love characterize those who are in the light. Disobedience and hatred characterize those who are in the darkness. A man may say he is in the light, but if he hates his brother, he is still in darkness, and has never seen the light. He knows not "the light of life." But if we see the outgoings of divine love toward a brother, we can say, There is a man who dwells in the light. He has found God who is light; and having found the light, he has the love also, for "God is light," and "God is love"; and we cannot have the one without the other, just as you cannot have the sun without having both light and heat.

The light casts out the darkness, and then there is no occasion of stumbling. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). And He who has shined in our hearts as light is love also. Wonderful grace to such as were once "darkness," but now "light in the Lord."

Have our eyes been opened to see the light? Have our hearts tasted the love? Oh! then to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor”; and to walk “as children of light (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:2,8-10). Let us walk in the light and sunshine of His presence who could say, “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,” never swerving from this path, and who, “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1).

Things New and Old: Volume 32, Atoning Sufferings of Christ: Third Letter on the (1:29)

My dear Brother, I will begin my answer to your letter by referring to your question about John 1:29. You quote it, “take away the sins of the world.” I do not know if it was just a slip of the pen, or whether you have never noticed it, but this is not correct. It is “sin,” not “sins.” And this makes an immense difference. It is often quoted, “sins of the world;” but this is wrong. “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” It is not a question of the sinful deeds of men, but of sin which came into the world by the first man. Sin has blighted and ruined everything connected with the first creation. The very ground is cursed for man’s sake, and brings forth thorns and briars. Now sin which has done this is to be removed; and the Lamb of God is the One who is to do this. On the ground of His sacrifice on the cross every vestige of sin will be removed. This has not been done yet, though the sacrificial work, which is the ground of it, has been accomplished. The removal of it will be completed when the new heavens and new earth are brought in. The present heavens and earth are defiled, and will be dissolved, and when that takes place, sin will be removed. There will be no sin in the new heavens and new earth. The wicked will not be there, and no evil will be there. All will be purified according to the value of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and righteousness will dwell there instead of sin. (2 Pet. 3) So we see in α Col. 1:20, that all things in heaven and earth—all things, not all men—are to be reconciled to the Godhead by the blood of Jesus’ cross. In verse 21 we see that men who believe are now reconciled; but the reconciliation of all things will be when the new heavens and new earth are established. Wicked men, who refuse Christ, and wicked angels, are never reconciled, but will be banished from the presence of the Lord, and from the heavens and earth, the scene of the display of His glory, never to defile them again through sin.

Now a word about Isa. 53:6. You desire to know who is meant by “us all.” I believe there the prophet, speaking by the Spirit, gives utterance to the sentiments that will be wrought by the same Spirit in the hearts of the remnant of the Jews who will be brought into blessing at the coming of the Lord; that is, when God’s dealings with Israel will have led this remnant to repentance. They will look on Him whom they pierced, and confess their sin and iniquity in having despised and rejected Him. But this will be in faith, and therefore in blessing to their souls. Through grace they will see that the One whom they despised and slew was wounded for their transgressions, and that Jehovah had laid their iniquity on Him, and that He had atoned for it, His soul having been made an offering for sin. It is the language of faith, confessing sins, but at the same time seeing how Jehovah had dealt with their sins in the death of their Messiah.

In Lev. 16, the type answers to this. There are two goats, one for Jehovah, and one for Israel; one whose blood is carried into the holiest and put on the mercy-seat, and the other for a scapegoat to bear away the sins of the people. When the high priest carried in the blood of the slain goat, and sprinkled it on and before the mercy-seat, &c, he came out to the waiting congregation outside, and confessed their sins on the head of the scapegoat, and they were then borne away into a land not inhabited. Now you will see in that chapter there were two classes of people—Aaron and his house, and the congregation of Israel. Aaron offered a bullock for himself and his house, but there is nothing about his coming out and confessing the sin of his house on another bullock. Why this difference? It shows the perfectness of the type. Aaron’s house is a type of God’s house now, as seen in Hebrews. Aaron’s sons were priests, and served in the holy place. So we see in Hebrews, those who are of God’s house now are priests and have access by the blood of Jesus into the sanctuary, even the holiest, because the veil is rent And there they have Christ over them as their High Priest.

Now this High Priest has gone into the presence of God for us by His own blood, but has not yet come out again. Only the Holy Ghost has come and testified that He has obtained eternal redemption, and that our sins shall be remembered no more, so that we have now access to the holiest as a priestly house while the High Priest is still within. We do not need to wait till He comes again to know our acceptance, since the Holy Ghost has borne witness, and we have believed. Through grace we are associated with the High Priest as His house, and with Him over us we draw near to God without a veil, and without a cloud, because we are there according to the infinite, unchanging, eternal value of the sacrifice of Christ.

Not so Israel. They are still outside, waiting till the High Priest comes out and shows Himself to them. Just as the congregation waited outside until the high priest came out and confessed their sins on the head of the scapegoat, so Israel now waits (in unbelief, as we know) until Christ comes out and reveals Himself to them as the true High Priest who has presented a propitiatory sacrifice for them, and who has confessed their sins as His own, and borne them away. This they will learn and acknowledge, as in Isa. 53 They will look on Him whom they pierced, and they will say, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” It is most blessed to see the grace that leads them to acknowledge their sins, and leads them to see how when they were killing their own King, the Prince of life, God was providing a Sacrifice to put away their sins.

The direct application, then, of Isa. 53 is to Israel. Yet the principle applies now wherever there is faith. Peter so applied it with Jews who accepted Christianity, as we see in 1 Pet. 2:25. As sheep gone astray they had returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, who had borne their sins in His own body on the tree. We have the same principle also in the end of Rom. 4 where Paul says, “Who was delivered for OUR offenses.” It is the language of faith. Those who submit to God’s righteousness by faith in Jesus have the title to say, “Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” And when they can say this, they have peace with God. They see that their sins were judicially transferred to Christ, and borne by Him, as the One who offered Himself to God for this purpose; so that now, through faith in Him, they are justified by His blood, that blood which cleanseth from all sin.

I know not whether I make it clear to you or not. It is clear to my own soul. And I may say, it was this truth that set my soul in God’s presence without a cloud, according to God’s righteousness by which He justifies on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ.

I will now refer to some points in your letter connected with the sufferings of Christ.

You say, you “see that Christ suffered from God, or rather that He suffered because in time of need He was forsaken of God.” You also say these were “the most terrible sufferings;” and again, this “was the inward suffering, and the outward sufferings were from men.” I think there is a partial admission of the truth here, though not clear; and it is afterward spoiled by your calling in question His suffering “under the judgment of God.” Now what I affirm is, that He did suffer under that judgment, and that is the uniform teaching of scripture;—under God’s judgment, not for His own sins (for He was without sin), but for the sins of His people. He “was delivered for our offenses,” “bare our sins,” “was offered to bear the sins of many,” and when they were laid on Him, He was bruised and smitten of Jehovah.

You may say, men were the “instruments,” and God “permitted” them, and that what God permits is often spoken of as if He does it Himself. To a certain extent this is true, and has an important bearing on the sufferings of Christ, especially in their application to the nation of Israel, or the remnant that will form the nation by-and-by. But this must not be used to neutralize the truth as to the really atoning suffering of Christ. The Jewish remnant in the latter day will be given up to their enemies as Christ was, and will be down-trodden and oppressed when the wicked are set up, and flourish as the green bay tree. They will feel too that they are under the hand of God, in affliction and sore chastisement because of their sins, and, while upright in heart, without the sense of God’s favor. The blessed Lord has entered into all this at the cross, as delivered up to His enemies, and as Messiah cut off, and not receiving the kingdom. And thus He will be able to sympathize with the remnant in the latter day, and sustain them in all their sorrows and anguish of heart. But this is not our subject just now, important as it is for the understanding of many scriptures in connection with Israel. Our subject now is the atoning suffering of Christ, not what He suffered in order to sympathize with others.

(To be continued,)

Things New and Old: Volume 29, Life, The (1:4)

In John 5:19, we are told that “the whole world lieth in the wicked one;” and in Eph. 2:1-3, that “we walked according to the course of’ this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all [Jews as well as Gentiles] had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh... and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” What a solemn statement’s as to the condition of man in the world! The whole world lying in the wicked one! Children of disobedience, energized by the prince of this world! By nature the children of wrath! How, terrible, and how absolutely hopeless the condition!

Yet this is the condition of “the first man” as described by the Spirit of God, and that too after 4000 years of testing, with every appliance for his recovery. But there was no recovery for the first man. The ruin-was complete and irretrievable. He had fallen under the power of Satan, and his life was blighted and utterly corrupted by sin. Without law, he was lawless; under law, a transgressor; in the presence of grace, in God come down to earth, revealed in the Son, he was a God-hater. Such was the terrible condition of man, in whom the fountain of life was corrupted and mined.

Blessed be God, another life has been, manifested in the very scene where the first was destroyed, a life that subsisted in the Son with the Father from all eternity, and was manifested in Him down here on earth before the eyes of men. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” This was a new beginning for man in grace, and the revelation of a new life for man, a life that was before all worlds, and before all creatures, and a life that Satan could not touch, nor sin corrupt. This new beginning is life revealed in the Person of the eternal Son in manhood down here, and so the apostle says, “That which was from the beginning” It is not the same as “In the beginning” in John’s Gospel, where the eternity of the Word is the subject. “In the beginning was the Word.” The Word existed in the beginning, did not begin to exist then, but existed, and, moreover, spoke into existence everything that began to exist. In the Epistle of John, “the beginning” is the beginning of the manifestation of eternal life on earth, in the Person of God’s Son become Man. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among men here below and through that veil of flesh His glory shone out before their eyes. They saw Him as an only begotten with a Father, and the fullness of grace and truth was there for man. What a wonderful beginning! He was “the Word of life.” “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” “Light” and “life,” “grace and truth,” shone out in Him amid “the darkness” of this world. It was a wonderful display! It was God Himself come down into all the misery and wretchedness of man—God manifested in the flesh. All that God is in light and love, truth and holiness, righteousness and grace, shone out. “The life was manifested,” and in this life there was the display of all that God could be in eternal blessing, for His lost and guilty creatures. The life was manifested in the Person of the eternal Son become man, and dwelling among men, the light of life shone out amid the darkness, and shone for every man, not for Jews only, but for Gentiles as well. It was the brightness of heaven itself let down into the darkness here, and shining for all, just as the sun, the mighty orb of the day, shines for the whole world.

I repeat, it was in the Person of the Son; and when men saw Him, they saw the life. Faith saw the life and rejoiced in its light. The apostles were attracted to its glory, shining out in Him, and became the witnesses to others of that wondrous life. In every word He spoke, in every movement, in every act, they saw the life, shining out in its divine nature and character. They heard it, they saw it, they gazed on it, they handled it with their hands. The apostle who wrote this epistle, could say, “The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” Yes, they saw the life, and followed its pathway of light through this dark world. They witnessed its patient ministry of love and mercy, in ten thousand ways relieving from the misery and wretchedness sin had brought in. Then, last of all, and greatest of all, they saw it meeting man’s utmost need in that terrible cross, where all that God is in majesty and lowliness, shone out in the judgment of sin; and all that He is in love and, grace shone out in righteous blessing for man, resurrection witnessing eternal victory over sin and over all the power of Satan. The clouds of darkness were now broken; God had come out, and the clear light was now shining out in all the glory of grace, witnessing unhindered and unlimited blessing for man. The apostles saw, believed, possessed. They were made partakers of the life, and brought into fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. The revelation of this life was a revelation of blessing, to them and all who receive their word, bringing into a fellowship which lifts the soul above the circumstances of misery and sorrow through which we pass in this world. They saw the life, displayed, and not only were

quicken with it, but also drank in its spirit and character, as they beheld its outgoings in the blessed Son of God. Partakers of the divine nature, they were also filled with common thoughts, desires, delights, joys with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ: and this in an established and known relationship, of which Christ was the measure and character. Who can estimate the blessedness of this?

And now the apostle says, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The apostles saw, and have borne witness; we have believed, and enter into fellowship with them. What more could we ask on this side of the glory, than to be brought into a fellowship like this? How unspeakably great the blessing! Would we, like the foolish Gnostics, seek for something beyond this? some new and further development? Are we not satisfied with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, and fellowship with them? Surely this is enough to satisfy and fill the soul. It is by faith we enter into it now; but it is what we shall have in glory, when introduced into the deep, eternal joy and blessedness of the Father's house, where we shall, be like Christ, and shall see His face. We are not there yet; but it is all unfolded to us, and faith drinks it in, and the heart and affections are molded by it, and find their home there, and a joy which the world knows not of.

"These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full," says the apostle John, who had drunk to the full at this eternal spring of joy. "That your joy may be full!" What a word of comfort for those to whom sin had wrung out a full cup of sorrow, but who have come to Christ to drink of the fountain of life and blessing, and exchange that cup of sorrow for the cup of joy! It is not a half and half thing that cannot fully satisfy. We are brought to that which is the spring of heaven's own joy, which fills the heart of the Father with eternal delight, which commands the homage and praise of all the hosts above, the very center of heaven's glory, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and revealer of the Father; and surely this is enough to fill our poor hearts with a joy never known before. God would have us filled even now with the joy that will fill us through all eternity. He has connected us by faith, with a scene which His own presence fills; and He would have us enjoy the relationship into which He has brought us, finding our spring of joy in Himself, and drinking to the full.

May we know more and more the fullness of this joy with which God Himself delights to fill us, that in some feeble measure, at least, we may reflect that Christ in whom it has been revealed to us, and in whom we are introduced into the fullness of eternal blessing, A. H. R.

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