

TESTIMONY

For the Church.

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### Willing Obedience.

ABRAHAM was an old man when he received the startling command from God to offer up his son Isaac for a burnt offering. Abraham was considered an old man even in his generation. The ardor of his youth had faded away. It was no longer easy for him to endure hardships and brave dangers. In the vigor of youth man may breast the storm with a proud consciousness of strength, and rise above discouragements that would cause his heart to fail later in life when his steps are faltering towards the grave.

But God in his providence reserved his last most trying test for Abraham, until the burden of years was heavy upon him and he longed for rest from anxiety and toil. The Lord spoke unto him, saying, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt-offering." The heart of the old man stood still with horror. The loss of such a son by disease would have been most heart-rending to the fond father, it would have bowed his whitened head with sorrow; but now he is commanded to shed the precious blood of that

son with his own hand. It seemed to him a fearful impossibility.

Yet God had spoken and his word must be obeyed. Abraham was stricken in years, but this did not excuse him from his duty. He grasped the staff of faith, and in dumb agony, took his child by the hand, beautiful in the rosy health of youth, and went out to obey the word of God. The grand old patriarch was human; his passions and attachments were like unto ours; he loved this boy who was the solace of his old age, and unto whom the promise of the Lord had been given.

But Abraham did not stop to question how God's promises could be fulfilled if Isaac was slain, he did not stay to reason with his aching heart; but he carried out the divine command to the very letter, till, just as the knife is about to be plunged into the quivering flesh of the child, the word came, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad," "for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

This great act of faith is pencilled on the pages of sacred history to shine forth upon the world as an illustrious example to the end of time. Abraham did not plead that his old age should excuse him from obeying God. He did not say, "My hairs are gray, the vigor of my manhood is gone; who will comfort my waning life when Isaac is no more? How can an aged father spill the blood of an only son?"

No; God had spoken, and man must obey

without questioning or murmuring or fainting by the way. We need the faith of Abraham in our churches to-day, to lighten the darkness that gathers round them, shutting out the sweet sunlight of God's love, and dwarfing spiritual growth.

Age will never excuse us from obeying God. Our faith should be prolific of good works, for faith without works is dead. Every duty performed, every sacrifice in the name of Jesus, brings an exceeding great reward. In the very act of duty, God speaks and gives his blessing. But he requires of us an entire surrender of the faculties. The mind and heart, the whole being must be given to him, or we fall short of becoming true Christians.

Christ withheld nothing from man that he might give him eternal riches. He has adorned the earth with beauty and furnished it with use and comfort during his temporal life. He has given his son to die for the redemption of a world that had fallen through sin and folly. Such matchless love, such infinite sacrifice claims our strictest obedience, our holiest love, our unbounded faith. Yet all these virtues, exercised to their fullest, can never be commensurate with the great sacrifice that has been offered for us.

God requires prompt and unquestioning obedience of his law. But men are asleep or paralyzed by the deceptions of Satan who suggests excuses and subterfuges, and con-

quers their scruples, saying as he did to Eve in the garden, "Ye shall not surely die." Disobedience not only hardens the heart and conscience of the guilty one, but it tends to corrupt the faith of others. That which looked very wrong to them at first, gradually loses this appearance by being constantly before them, till finally they question whether it is really sin, and unconsciously fall into the same error.

Through Samuel, God commanded Saul to go and smite the Amalekites and utterly destroy all their possessions. But Saul only partially obeyed the command; he destroyed the inferior cattle, but reserved the best, and spared the wicked king. The next day he met the prophet Samuel with flattering self-congratulations: Said he, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But the prophet immediately answered, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

Saul was confused and sought to shirk responsibility by answering, "*They* have brought them from the Amalekites, for the *people* spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed." Samuel then reproved the king, reminding him of the explicit commands of God, directing him to destroy all things belonging to Amalek. He pointed out his transgressions and declared that he had disobeyed the Lord. But

Saul refused to acknowledge that he had done wrong; he again excused his sin by pleading that he had reserved the best cattle to sacrifice unto the Lord.

Samuel was grieved to the heart by the persistency with which the king refused to see his sin and confess it. He sorrowfully asked, "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. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

We should not look in the face of duty and delay meeting its demands. Such delay gives time for doubts, unbelief creeps in, the judgment is perverted, the understanding darkened. At length the reproofs of God's Spirit do not reach the heart of the deluded person, who has become so blinded as to think that they cannot possibly be intended for him or apply to his case.

The precious time of probation is passing, and few realize that it is given them for the purpose of preparing for eternity. The golden hours are squandered in worldly pursuits, in pleasure, in absolute sin. God's law is slighted and forgotten, yet every statute is none the less binding. Every transgression will bring its punishment. Worldly love of gain desecrates the Sabbath, yet the claims

of that holy day are not abrogated or lessened. God's command is clear and unquestionable on this point; he has peremptorily forbidden us to labor upon the seventh day. He has set it apart as a day sanctified to himself.

Many are the hindrances that lay in the path of those who would follow in obedience the commandments of God. There are strong and subtle influences that bind them to the ways of the world; but the power of the Lord can break these chains. He will remove every obstacle from before the feet of his faithful ones, or give them strength and courage to conquer every difficulty, if they earnestly beseech his help. All hindrances will vanish before an earnest desire and persistent effort to do the will of God at any cost to self, even if life itself is sacrificed. Light from Heaven will illuminate the darkness of those, who, in trial and perplexity, go forward looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of their faith.

In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouths of prophets and apostles. In these days he speaks to them by the testimonies of his Spirit. There was never a time when God more earnestly instructed his people concerning his will, and the course that he would have them pursue, than now. But will they profit by his teachings, will they receive his reproofs and heed his warnings? God will accept of no partial obedience nor sanction any compromise with self.

## The Twelve Spies.

THE Lord commanded Moses to send men to search the land of Canaan, which he would give unto the children of Israel. A ruler of each tribe was to be selected for this purpose. They went, and after forty days returned from their search, and came before Moses and Aaron, and all the congregation of Israel, and showed them the fruit of the land. All agreed that it was a good land, and they exhibited the rich fruit which they had brought as evidence. One cluster of grapes was so large that two men carried it between them on a staff. They also brought of the figs, and the pomegranates, which grew there in abundance. After they had spoken of the fertility of the land, all but two spoke very discouragingly of their being able to possess it. They said that the people were very strong that dwelt in the land, and the cities were surrounded with great and high walls, and, more than all this, they saw the children of the giant Anak there. They then described how the people were situated around Canaan, and the impossibility of their ever being able to possess it.

As the people listened to this report, they gave vent to their disappointment with bitter reproaches and wailing. They did not wait, and reflect, and reason that God, who had brought them out thus far, would certainly give them the land. They left God out of the question. They acted as though

in the taking of the city of Jericho, the key to the land of Canaan, they must depend solely on the power of arms. God had declared that he would give them the country, and they should have fully trusted him to fulfill his word. But their unsubdued hearts were not in harmony with his plans. They did not reflect how wonderfully he had wrought in their behalf, bringing them out of their Egyptian bondage, cutting a path for them through the waters of the sea, and destroying the pursuing host of Pharaoh.

In their unbelief they were limiting the work of God, and distrusting the hand that had hitherto safely guided them. In this instance they repeated their former error of murmuring against Moses and Aaron. "This, then, is the end of all our high hopes," said they. "This is the land we have traveled all the way from Egypt to possess." They blamed their leaders with bringing trouble upon Israel, and again charged them with deceiving and leading their people astray. Moses and Aaron lay prostrate before God, their faces in the dust.

Caleb and Joshua, the two who, of all the twelve spies, trusted in the word of God, rent their clothes in distress, when they perceived that these unfavorable reports had discouraged the whole camp. They endeavored to reason with them, but the congregation were filled with madness and disappointment, and refused to listen to these two men. Finally Caleb urged his way to the front, and

his clear, ringing voice was heard above all the clamor of the multitude. He opposed the cowardly views of his fellow-spies, which had weakened the faith and courage of all Israel.

He commanded the attention of the people, and they hushed their complaints for a moment to listen to him. He spoke of the land he had visited. Said he, "Let us go up at once; for we are well able to overcome it." But as he spoke, the unfaithful spies interrupted him, crying, "We be not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we!"

These men, starting upon a wrong course, set their hearts against God, against Moses and Aaron, and against Caleb and Joshua. Every step they advanced in this wrong direction made them firmer in their design to discourage every attempt to possess the land of Canaan. They distorted the truth in order to carry their baneful influence. They represented the climate as being unhealthful, and all the people of giant stature. Said they, "And there we saw the giants, the sons of the giants, the sons of Anak, which came of the giants, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."

This was not only an evil, but a lying report. It was contradictory; for if the land was unhealthy and "had eaten up the inhabitants," how was it that they attained to such massive proportions. When men in

responsible positions yield their hearts to unbelief, there are no bounds to the advance they will make in evil. Few realize, when they start upon this dangerous course, the length that Satan will lead them.

The evil report had a terrible effect upon the people. They reproached Moses and Aaron bitterly. Some groaned and wailed, saying, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or, Would God we had died in the wilderness!" Then their feelings rose against the Lord, they wept and mourned, saying, "Wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another: Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

Thus they manifested their disrespect for God and for the leaders he had appointed to conduct them. They did not ask the Lord what they should do, but said, "Let us make a captain." They took matters in their own hands, feeling themselves competent to manage their affairs without divine aid. They not only accused Moses of deception, but also God, in promising a land which they were not able to possess. They actually went so far as to appoint one of their number as a captain, to lead them back to the land of their suffering and bondage, from which God had delivered them with his strong arm of omnipotence.

Moses and Aaron still remained prostrate

before God in the presence of all the assembly, silently imploring divine mercy for rebellious Israel. Their distress was too deep for words. Again Caleb and Joshua press to the front, and the voice of Caleb once more rises in sorrowful earnestness above the complaints of the congregation.

“The land which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land that floweth with milk and honey; only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us. Their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Fear them not.”

The Canaanites had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and the Lord would no longer bear with them. His defense being removed from them, they would fall an easy pray to the Hebrews. They were not prepared for battle, for they felt so strong that they deceived themselves with the idea that no army was formidable enough to prevail against them. Caleb reminded the people that by the covenant of God the land was insured to Israel. But their hearts were filled with madness and they would hear no more. If only the two men had brought the evil report, and all the ten had encouraged them to possess the land in the name of the Lord, they would still have taken the advice of the two in preference to the ten, because of their wicked unbelief.

But there were only two advocating the right, while ten were in open rebellion against their leaders and against God. The greatest excitement now raged among the people, their worst passions were aroused, and they refused to listen to reason. The ten unfaithful spies join them in their denunciations of Caleb and Joshua, and the cry is raised to stone them. The insane mob seize missiles with which to slay those faithful men. They rush forward with yells of madness, when, Lo! the stones drop from their hands, a hush falls upon them, and they shake with terror. God has interposed to check their rash design. The glory of his presence, like a flame of light, illuminates the tabernacle. All the congregation behold the signal of the Lord.

A mightier one than they, had revealed himself, and not one dared continue his resistance. Every murmurer was silenced. The spies who had brought the evil report, crouched terror-stricken and with bated breath. Moses now arose from his humiliating position and entered the tabernacle, to commune with God. Then the Lord proposed to immediately destroy this rebellious people. He desired to make of Moses a greater nation than Israel; but the meek leader of his people would not consent to this proposition. "And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them; and they will tell it to

the inhabitants of this land, for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people, that thou, Lord, art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by daytime in a pillar of cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now, if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness."

Moses again refuses to have Israel destroyed, and himself made a mightier nation than was Israel. This favored servant of God manifests his love for Israel, and shows his zeal for the glory of his Master, and the honor of his people. Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now, thou hast been long-suffering and merciful hitherto toward this ungrateful nation; and however unworthy they may be, thy mercy is the same. He pleads, Wilt thou not, therefore, spare them this once, and add this one more instance of divine patience to the many thou hast already given? -

Moses prevailed with God to spare the people; but because of their arrogance and unbelief, the Lord could not go with them to work in a miraculous manner in their behalf. Therefore, in his divine mercy, he bade them adopt the safest course, and turn back into the wilderness, towards the Red Sea. He also decreed that, as a punishment

for their rebellion, all the adults who left Egypt, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, should be forever excluded from Canaan. They had utterly failed to keep their promise of obedience to God, and this released him from the covenant that they had so repeatedly violated. He promised that their children should possess the goodly land, but their own bodies should be buried in the wilderness. And the ten unfaithful spies, whose evil report had caused Israel to murmur and rebel, were destroyed by the power of God, before the eyes of the people.

When Moses made known to Israel the will of God concerning them, they seemed to sincerely repent of their sinful conduct. But the Lord knew that their sorrow was because of the result of their evil course, rather than a deep sense of their ingratitude and disobedience. But their repentance came too late; the just anger of God was awakened, and their doom was pronounced from which there was no reprieve. When they found that the Lord would not relent in his decree, their self-will again arose, and they declared that they would not return into the wilderness.

In commanding them to retire from the land of their enemies, God tested their apparent submission and found it was not real. They knew that they had deeply sinned in allowing their rash feelings to control them, and seeking to slay the spies who had urged them to obey God. But they were only ter-

rified to find that they had made a fearful mistake, the consequences of which would prove disastrous to themselves. Their hearts were unchanged, and they only needed an excuse to occasion a similar outbreak. This presented itself when Moses, by the authority of God, commanded them to go back into the wilderness.

They had rebelled against his commands, when he bade them go up and take the land he had promised them, and now, that he directed them to retreat from it, they were equally insubordinate, and declared they would go to battle with their enemies. They arrayed themselves in their warriors' dress and armor, and presented themselves before Moses, prepared for conflict, in their own estimation, but sadly deficient in the sight of God and his sorrowful servant. They refused to listen to the solemn warnings of their leaders that disaster and death would be the consequence of their audacity.

When God directed them to go up and take Jericho, he promised to go with them. The ark containing his law was to be a symbol of himself. Moses and Aaron, God's appointed leaders, were to conduct the expedition under his watchful direction. With such supervision, no harm could have come to them. But now, contrary to the command of God, and the solemn prohibition of their leaders, without the ark of God and without Moses, they march out to meet the armies of the enemy.

During the time consumed by the Israelites in their wicked insubordination, the Amalekites and Canaanites had prepared for battle. The Israelites presumptuously challenged the foe that had not dared to attack them. But just as they had fairly entered the enemy's territory, the Amalekites and Canaanites met them in force and fiercely repulsed them, driving them back with great loss. The field of carnage was red with the blood of the Hebrews, and their dead bodies strewed the ground. They were utterly routed and defeated. Destruction and death was the result of their rebellious experiment.

But the faith of Caleb and Joshua was richly rewarded. According to his word, God brought these faithful two into the land he had promised to them. The cowards and rebels perished in the wilderness, but the righteous spies did eat of the grapes of Eschol.

The history of the twelve spies' report has an application to us as a people. The scenes of cowardly complaining and drawing back from action when there are risks to encounter, are re-enacted among us to-day. The same unwillingness is manifested to heed faithful reports and true counsel, as in the days of Caleb and Joshua. The servants of God, who bear the burden of his cause, practicing strict self-denial and suffering privation for the sake of helping his people, are seldom better appreciated now than then.

Ancient Israel was repeatedly tested and

found wanting. Few received the faithful warnings given them of God. Darkness and unbelief does not decrease as we near the time of the second advent of Christ. Truth becomes less and less palatable to the carnal-minded; their hearts are slow to believe, and tardy to repent. The servants of God might well become discouraged, were it not for the continual evidences their Master gives them of his wisdom and assistance. Long has the Lord borne with his people. He has forgiven their wanderings, and waited for them to give him room in their hearts; but false ideas, jealousy and distrust have crowded him out.

Few who are professedly of Israel, and whose minds have been enlightened by the revelations of divine wisdom, dare to come boldly forward, as did Caleb, and stand firmly for God and the right. Because those whom the Lord has chosen to conduct his work, will not be swerved from the course of integrity, to gratify the selfish and unconsecrated, they become the target for hatred and malicious falsehood. Satan is wide awake and working warily in these last days. God calls for men of spiritual nerve and stamina to resist his artifices.

Thorough conversion is necessary among those who profess to believe the truth, in order for them to follow Jesus, and obey the will of God. Not a submission born of circumstances as was that of the terrified Israelites, when the power of the Infinite was revealed to them, but a deep and heart-felt re-

pentance and renunciation of sin. Those who are but half-converted, are as a tree whose boughs hang upon the side of truth, but whose roots, firmly bedded in the earth, strike out into the barren soil of the world. Jesus looks in vain for fruit upon its branches, he finds nothing but leaves.

Thousands would accept the truth, if they could do so without denying self; but this class would never build up the cause of God. These would never march out valiantly against the enemy, which is the world, the love of self and the lusts of the flesh, trusting their divine Leader to give them the victory. The church needs faithful Calebs and Joshuas, who are ready to accept eternal life on God's simple conditions of obedience. Our churches are suffering for laborers. The world is our field. Missionaries are wanted in cities and villages that are more certainly bound by idolatry than the pagans of the East, who have never seen the light of truth. The true missionary spirit has deserted the churches that make so exalted a profession; their hearts are no longer aglow with love for souls, and a desire to lead them into the fold of Christ. We want earnest workers. Are there none to respond to the cry that goes up from every quarter: "Come over and help us?"

Can those who profess to be the repositories of God's law, and who look for the soon coming of Jesus in the clouds of heaven, stand acquitted of the blood of souls, if they