

dom, and that all men are under moral obligation to obey the prescribed will of God.

We are informed, upon divine authority, that Christ has commanded the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The apostles, acting under inspiration, delivered these ordinances to the churches. Paul says, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." And in our text he praises the Corinthian brethren for having remembered him in all things, and kept the ordinances as he had delivered them to them. To which we may add other portions of his references to this subject. Such as, "I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church." (1 Cor. iv. 16, 17.) "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches." (1 Cor. vii. 17.) "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle." (2 Thes. ii. 15.) "Now we command you brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." (2 Thes. iii. 6.) It is evident, from these expressions, that the apostle was not only pleased with, but also praised all those who had remembered the doctrines which he had taught them, and practiced the ordinances according to divine rule.

Now, if the Holy Spirit, under whose influence Paul acted, praised those brethren for having kept the ordinances, as they had been "delivered unto them," is it not a fair inference that a neglect to have kept them according to the inspired precept and example would have incurred the displeasure of God?

No one will deny that the apostle acted under divine direction when afterward he rebuked the Corinthian Church for having partaken of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper contrary to his instruction and in a manner that was offensive to God. Hence this circumstance corroborates the inference that the neglect to keep the ordinances, as they are taught in the scripture, subjects to the displeasure of God. I do not see how any one can question the correctness of this position. And this is by no means an unimportant point, although it does not seem to have been taken into account by those who have changed the ordinances of God's house.

There are facts which establish this principle. That is that to change the laws, or ordinances of the house of God not only offends God, but does vitiate the service which is supposed to be rendered.

We have an illustration, of the correctness of our position, in the case of Saul's deviation from the command which God gave him, and its consequences. God sent Saul to destroy the Amalekites, and told him to destroy all men, women, and children, and oxen and sheep. And God gave him the victory over Israel's enemies. But Saul thought he could make some improvement, and instead of obeying God he saved Agag the king, and the best of the sheep and oxen. I suppose he reasoned that it was right to save human life, and that "frugality was commendable. Both of these thoughts are correct under corresponding circumstances! But they were altogether misapplied by Saul. So, we hear God saying of him, "He is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments." And Samuel said 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. 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."

Is not this a very plain illustration of the correctness of the proposition, which we have based upon the implication of our text? Saul varied from the divine command,

and thereby violated the divine law, offended God, and was punished for his wickedness, by having his kingdom taken from him! Neither did Saul's hiding the sheep and oxen, nor all his excuses avail him, when he had changed or "rejected" the instructions which God had given him.

"Literal obedience is essential to performance of a positive law."

Jesus says: "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." He also says: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John iv. 23, 24.) God's word is truth. Hence a departure from the inspired precepts renders our professed sanctity and obedience a vain thing. Such professions are destitute of that life, and power, and spirituality which are necessary in order that our efforts should meet with the divine approbation. Jesus asks "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke vi. 46.) How offensive to God must our professed obedience be, when it is the observance of something which we have substituted in the place of a divine command?

Peter and the other apostles regarded a yielding to the commandments of men as being a sin against God. They said, "We ought to obey God rather than man."

And, if the apostles were justifiable in disregarding all civil authority which led to a neglect of obedience to God, it is a fair inference that we are also required to disregard all ecclesiastical rule which is not in accordance with the precepts and examples of God's word.

The apostles evidently felt that any departure from the positive commands of God, rendered their professed obedience null and void.

We are sometimes told that the heart is what God requires, and that the spirit is better than the form. As though God had no respect for the commandments which He has given us. And, as though He has no respect for the very ordinances which He has instituted, and enjoined upon His people. If the expression—"the heart is what God requires"—is intended to lead persons to disregard the ordinances of God's house, which is its natural tendency, then we say perish such open warfare against God!

As Bible students we teach that persons must be converted, regenerated, saved, before they are proper subjects for gospel baptism and church membership, but be it far from us either to believe or teach that it is not necessary for believers to be baptized upon a profession of their faith into the church, and to "observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. God not only requires that we should be possessed of the proper spirit—that is the spirit of Christ, but He expressly states that the Spirit shall lead those who are under its influence. "into all truth." And no man who is not led by the Spirit of God should claim adoption into the heavenly family. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Neither should any man claim to be a member of a church of Christ without having observed the proper form—that is the prescribed form—of induction into the churches. The form of an ordinance is essential to obedience to the command which requires it. And this is especially where we are furnished, not only with the precept requiring it, but also, with the example of how it is done; as is the case in both baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Again, God had specific objects in view when he instituted these ordinances, and they were intended for the accomplishment of those objects, no more and no less. Therefore, if these ordinances are changed, they who change them vitiate their teachings, and consequently are like Saul subject to the penalty of having violated the divine commands.

But there are some persons who plead that there are insurmountable barriers in the way of a formal obedience to the ordinances, which Christ has enjoined. To which I reply, has Christ instituted ordinances which it is im-

possible for his followers to observe? If so, he either did or did not know that such was the case. If he did not know then he is not God, if he did know that such would be the case, then he has practiced an imposition upon his followers. Either of which is sufficient to show that Christ was an impostor. Which horn of this dilemma will our friends take? No Christian man can take either, therefore, this special pleading should be given up. There is neither command, permission, nor necessity intimated in the word of God, for the changing of the ordinances which Christ has instituted. And when we add the very plain testimony which the scriptures give against adding to, or taking from the word of God, it must be evident that to change the ordinances, either as to their order or form, is both sinful and reprehensible. Otherwise it is very difficult to understand what is a sin against God. Generally speaking they who do not yield obedience to the divinely instituted ordinances of the churches must be regarded as unwilling to obey God. Jesus says, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."

Dr. A. Barnes, on Mark xvi. 16, says, "It is worthy of remark that Jesus has made baptism of so much importance. He did not say, indeed, that a man could not be saved without baptism; but He has strongly implied that where this is neglected, knowing it to be a command of the Saviour, it endangers the salvation of the soul. Faith and baptism are the beginning of a Christian life; the one the beginning of piety in the soul, the other of its manifestation before men, or of a profession of religion. And no man can tell how much he endangers his eternal interest by being ashamed of Christ before men."

If Christ performed the long journey of three or more days for the express purpose of being baptized of John; if He, associating His followers with him, said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," then must it be dangerous presumption in others to despise the "ordinances which He has commanded. And there is no more necessity for the observance of baptism as delivered by divine authority, than there is for the Lord's Supper, each in their proper place.

Dr. Owen, who was a ripe biblical scholar, but by no means a Baptist, says: "Christ marrying His church to himself—taking it to that relation—still expressed the main of their chaste and choice affections to Him—to lie in their keeping His institutions and His worship according to His appointment. The breach of this He calls adultery everywhere, and whoredoms: He is a jealous God, and He gives himself that title only in respect of His institutions. And the whole apostasy of the Christian church unto false worship is called fornication (Rev. xvii. 5), and the church that leads the others to false worship, the mother of harlots. On this account those believers who really attend to communion with Jesus Christ—do labour to keep their hearts chaste to Him in His ordinances, institutions, and worship. . . . They will receive nothing—practice nothing—own nothing in His worship—but what is of His appointment. They know that from the foundation of the world He never did allow—nor ever will—that in anything the will of the creature should be the measure of His honour—or the principle of His worship—either as to matter or manner." (See Communion with God, part 2, chap. 5.) The following will, I think, be regarded as correct with reference to the claims of God's word, and our relation thereunto.

1. Whatsoever Christ has commanded, being of divine authority, that, and that only is binding upon His people. 2. The ordinances, as instituted and commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ, are the very best, in every sense, that could possibly be enjoined upon believers in Christ. 3. All God's children are under moral obligations, in the strictest sense of the term, to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. 4. Since to change, or neglect any of the things " whatsoever Christ has commanded" is not only to forfeit the blessing connected with obedience thereto, but also to incur the displeasure of God, therefore neither individuals nor all combined can with impunity, disregard or change any of the positive institutions which Christ has commanded the observance of. 5. And finally, for the sake of God concerning the ordinances of His churches and God holds us individually responsible to Him for the manner in which we treat His institutions, therefore let us read and study the scripture for our selves, and let us not substitute any human ordinance in the place of the divine ordinances, but be careful to remember the words of God concerning all things and keep the ordinances as inspiration has delivered them unto us. Amen.

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1882. THIRD QUARTER. Lesson VI.—AUGUST 6, 1882. THE FRUITLESS TREE. Mark xi. 12-23. COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 12-14.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."—John xv. 8.

DAILY HOME READINGS. M. The Lesson, Mark xi. 12-23. N. Visit of the Greeks, John xii. 20-35. W. The Ancient Jews, Isaiah i. 1-20. T. The Jews in Christ's Time, John viii. 31-59. F. Warning to Us, Rom. xi. 13-24. S. Believers God's Temple, 2 Cor. vi. 11-vii. 1. S. The Power of Faith, Heb. xi. 32-xii. 2.

THE FAITHLESS NATION. LESSON OUTLINE.—I. The Fruitless Fig-tree, Vss. 12-14. II. The Temple Cleansed, Vss. 15-19. III. The Power of Faith, Vss. 20-23.

QUESTIONS.—Vss. 12-14.—What sign of fruit did the tree give? What did Jesus find on it? Why did he sentence it to destruction? What parable helps us understand this miracle? What did the Jews profess to be? What were they generally? How did they show this?

Vss. 15-19.—What was the temple? What improper and wicked practices were there? In what capacity did Jesus reform them? What similar work in his early ministry? How should we regard the place of worship?

Vss. 20-23.—What astonished the disciples the next morning? What lesson did Jesus draw from the sight? Can a man have true faith to work miracles if God has not sent him to work them? What did the Jewish nation lack?

Special Subjects.—Fig trees, figs. Symbolism of the fig tree and its curse. Application to us. The proper limit to the use of church-buildings for other purposes than worship.

NOTES.—I. Fruitlessness, (Vss. 12-14.) On the morrow. The next day after the triumphal entry, i. e., on Monday. Jesus had spent the night at Bethany, and was returning to Jerusalem in the early morning, (Matt. xxi. 18), before breakfast, and therefore he was hungry.

According to Kitto, it was not the custom to breakfast before the hour of morning sacrifice, which was nine o'clock; and Jesus was probably intent upon getting to the temple for that service. Having subjected himself to human limitations, his was genuine hunger; nor could he command stones to be made bread (Matt. iv. 3) to satisfy his own wants; but must look to ordinary sources for his food. A fig-tree. Though fig-trees were abundant in that region, this tree was evidently solitary, standing alone, "in the way," (Matt. xxi. 19), or by the wayside. It is said that it was the practice to plant fig-trees by the wayside. Having leaves. Leaves indicated fruit, and were promises of it. Hence the Saviour drew near, if haply he might find anything thereon. It was natural to suppose that there would be fruit where there were leaves, because, as Thomson says, in "The Land and the Book," "the fig-tree often produces fruit as early as leaves, or even earlier." Nothing but leaves. No fruit, to fulfill the expectations which the leaves were calculated to excite. The time of figs was not yet. This was the beginning of April; and, as yet, early even for early figs. Ordinarily, no one would have thought of ripe figs so soon; but the leaves, which, in the case of the fig tree, come simultaneously with, or even after the fruit, seemed to say to the passer-by: "Here is fruit already ripe for your refreshment." The tree seemed to make a boast that it was in advance of all others, and professed to have what it had not. It is not said that Jesus expected to find fruit, being ignorant of the truth. He simply took the tree at its own representation of itself; and whereas it wanted itself on its fruitfulness, he found it barren. No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever. It is impossible to find anger in this expression, as it would come from the Saviour's lips. The whole transaction seems to be a parable, by which important lessons are taught. Primarily, it applies to Israel, a fruitless tree, yet making a show of religious activities. Hypocrisy and fruitlessness bring a fearful doom; the parable is applicable to all who, with professions of godliness, and professions of service, are yet bearing no true fruit of piety, or of joyous service to God.

II. Cleansing the Temple, (Vss. 15-19.) V. 15.—Began to cast out them, etc. The purifying of the temple, mentioned in John ii. 13-17, was at the beginning of Christ's ministry; this was at its close. The two scenes are similar; and significant in themselves, as well as in the periods when they occurred. They asserted his authority, and symbolized his work. The portion of the temple made a market of, was the Court of the Gentiles. This was a convenience to persons from a distance who came to sacrifice, who could there purchase the victims needed for the service. Not only were the noise of the animals and the tumult of barter a disturbance to true worshippers, but the occupation of the Court of the Gentiles in this way, shut out the Gentiles from the temple; as they were not allowed in the inner courts. Money changers. Strangers coming with foreign coins would need to exchange them, in order to pay the half-shekel temple-tax, as well as for other services. Doves. The offerings of the poor. See Lev. xii. 6-8; Luke ii. 24. Vss. 16, 17.—Would not suffer . . . carry any vessel through the temple. The same respect must be shown to the Court of the Gentiles as to other portions of the temple; a fact that the Jews, in their contempt for any outside of their own nation, were apt to disregard. This part of the temple enclosure was not to be made a thoroughfare, as if inferior to other portions. My house . . . of all nations the house of prayer. No disrespect should be put upon the place where Gentiles could come to pray. See Isa. lvi. 7. A den of thieves. A cave of bandits. See Jer. vii. 11.

Vs. 18, 19.—How they might destroy him. The Scribes and Chief Priests were enraged at his action, which condemned them; and also alarmed at his popularity with the people. They feared that he might ride on the popular wave to an assertion of kingship. Out of the city. Back to Bethany, where he spent his nights. III. Faith, (Vss. 20-23.) In the morning, i. e., of Tuesday, as he and his disciples passed from Bethany to Jerusalem, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. It was completely blighted and dead. Peter attributed the death of the tree to the curse of Jesus; and our Lord assented to that view. Have faith in God. Jesus does not explain the symbolic meaning of this withered tree, but teaches them the higher lesson of faith. Far greater things than blighting a tree could be done through faith. Faith can even remove mountains. See 1 Cor. xiii. 2. Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, etc. The language of hyperbole was familiar to the Jews. It is not necessary to construe this literally; for it is scarcely conceivable that any advantage could be gained by Mount Olivet, or any other mountain, being cast into the sea. But it is true, nevertheless, that difficulties greater than mountains yield to the prayer of faith. Faith should be intelligent, however, and know that the great thing asked for is according to the mind of God. He shall have whatsoever he saith. Wonderful words. Let us not take from their power, by unbelieving limitations. There is such a thing as explaining the promises away.

SUGGESTED LESSONS. A fruitless tree, and a fruitless temple. Nothing but leaves on the one; empty forms, and selfish greed in the other. Both find their fulfillment to-day; the first in the empty professor, the second in the lifeless church.

A show of "leaves" may deceive ourselves and others; but our Lord searches us, and is satisfied only with fruit. To the eyes of God, nothing is so offensive as pretense. "I would that thou were either cold or hot."

A mountain, so solidly based, and so deeply rooted, is a fitting symbol of obstacles supposed insuperable. And our Saviour means to teach that, in the presence of genuine faith, difficulties the most formidable vanish into thin air. Let us read the marvelous record, faith's triumphs, as it is recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews; and let us realize that God's promises and faith's power are just the same as in the olden time.

Help for Parents, or for the Teacher of the Primary Class. We are now studying the events in the life of our Lord which occurred during the week before his death. Jesus enters Jerusalem on the Jew's Sabbath? Tell the story of the early walk back from Bethany, "on the morrow." They started before breakfast; and so, after walking some time in the morning air, grew hungry. Tell the story of the fig-tree, as in vs. 13, 14. What did Jesus hope to find? What did he find? When do figs generally come on the fig-tree? As soon, or even before, the leaves. The leaves seemed to say; "There is some fruit on this tree"; but what kind of a tree did it prove to be?

Continue the account of the way in which Jesus spent the day, as in vs. 15-18. Why did Jesus care so much for the temple? Whose house was it? It was his father's. What were doves sold in the temple for? Some people are very much like the "fruitless fig tree." They talk very well about Jesus; but they do not do those things that please Jesus. They do not bear fruit for Jesus. What fruit does Jesus want to see his disciples bear? Read Gal. v. 22, 23. Dwell especially upon gentleness, goodness, FAITH. And, in connection with faith, bring out vs. 22, 23. Teach the Golden Text.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

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