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Obedience to the Will of God

Earl Clement Davis

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1.<u>a</u> Chechiever to the Will of God. "and my Fother are the" I mish to speak on a hechine to the will of Soch and its relations to our word and finted life. It what does it consist? what are its fruits. Love hunched years have vot yet forsed suce fourthou Edwards and his follower Hew ufor the dying endur of Colvincian and caused them to bust forth into the last plichening flowe, hefore its vitabily had burnel ant avel left it wothing but the cold lifetan ashes of history. Get that last flickering flame of a dying religious system contained a former and a vinichers, a warmth from which worry a for sove received the quickening inforte to a deefer and was spiritore life. Whotever way five been the

livitations under which Echwards interfet: ech his religious experiences, the fort revains that he bod been twoched by the former of the fuitvol life. He book responded to the commend of the first great commend: went, then shalt live the End. Thy good with sel thy heart, and with all they wind and with all they sere." but the second commenchmant hol vot linched him deeply. He did not and could not love his veighter on himself, Hz tol vot gove deef everyth, a sympothitically everyth into the notice and furgires of the human hearts to really give work the fourse assent to the convence, then short line thy neighter. os thyselfs." His intellectvol surrormelings mere subject to influences that worde this in : forrible. Stoned we take this analyze that last plane of Colonism, servetines spoken

of as the Berkshire Divinity, - showed me avolyge it of the the chemiest anolyges the flames that brun from the substance in his crucible, we would find That it gives evidence of three great elements. The first element, the formelations and ce = menting substance of the whole system the day trive of the absolute servicing of God. This doctine seems to be an indicatim of the triumph of a worr sensible ofinin of the earlier sufer it's trins of new England which formulated a stor quite dearly definal boolisma, of as illustrated in the diamotic atinggles between Good and the Devil. This doctrine of the absolute some ignty of God, is strangely suggestive of if vot fuffilie of the results which worken scientists - home been dealing out to us for the last few years. The absolute surerighty

of notwol how it mas minered, and I inquestionable activity, beefarts of an oner whing former as somerigen and as obsolute, an enera technocle or tofkins or Enumers cheannel f. Upn This frint of the absolute Some got, of god, The Berkshire Discinites were not so far wrong if one wort worken enceptors the second great truth of Colvinian, was defendence ofm God, is quite in keeping with fore any volue. with the wost achrances scientific une flilaghing votions. When the scientil-till us that there is vot one atom of mother in all the miverse that is visicle the reign of long when the worbit conform in one way a another to the stevel live of underst, me are listening to a doctime of win defendeme ofen god set forth in wo less groeting terms than the sawe idea to we heated at the holds

of Edwards. I far me con agree as to the enertiel idea of Colvinism, olthough we must toke exception to the frames in which this idea wor expend - forms which were colored and distorted by the third element which is formal in Colorin in, Shis Thick elevent is the one which woken the whe system Anoxiers, revolting, and which in the more wor so swoel fortin in causing The orword womenant to leave Colorin ison behind, the votions of total deparity, and the stinement through Chint, and all the ideas convected there with one bouch upon a feoformal feerinism. If you stop to thick of it the entire system of icleas centering about the exfiction of chirt avel the doctive of electrin, is simply

abother way of exfressing the feelings of the won who thinks that everything is in a book way and all things are on the high wood to min. The true fersionst alworp reserves, from the dire colamity which is obut to one atoke the unetilede, a way of escope for himself and a chosen few, So also did the colin its. The pew elected to be seved, would by the for grace of gel though chirt ester into stewer feare, and gloot over their hoffy fate. This is a twe thoroughging ferrioning the last and wort complete expension of a fersimism that has been lacking in the system colled Chustionity since very early dop. Perhop it came from the East, and wer obserbed into me = chricol chial camp, as it wer under: going its transforwation from ets

earbert dogs of spiritool former into its ersentilly unspiritool system. The ski system in faring any. Holines' Ander file the How Stry" is a fointed desferithen of Colorinism, It was brilt in such a log= icol way, that it must collope. There was vo offertunity for refairs. now it has he = come hardly worr the a faint recollection of a boil chean, Even the wort Colinisti of this geven this have not the corroge and daring to firelaim the ductries of this wonderfully logical system. Get much of the old flase ology and wry of the terms are still used, bet they are so twisted, workefied, and re: fainted that one feels that thre who me them have not the sleighest an = after of the strength and suggedness of the interven system. Shey are dertany=

The historic chann which might center about the remains of the would fil one How floy" by trying to work them of inter timber for a carriege of the world would . An using such wards as the atment, for use a figure of from the worch of ferre, they are futting new nime into old bottles which still retain their old lobet. (here these bottles contained a string, sparkling wine discolored, to be sure, by a hackish ferrimin, but still with. But the sime for hear last and the for bottles have been filled by a flat, colorder, insigid water of sertimental: is . If we must the the alch bottles and old lobels, fray, let us have the old une also, It was a firminger strinvlent to the elect who could chink it. The Someneighty of Gool, and Thais Sefence: ance upu god! Is it faisible that the leader of the Berkshine Divinity abourhed

there truths from the very spirit of there ?? wormtains? Chercorne by the transcendant. glory, by the onerhadowing former of forl as revealed by the rugged ever changing Steneny in the micht of muchich he lived, did he we look upon himself, as the wort insignificent, the wort unworthy of heings what at hert could but faintly utter How terribly urricherful? Con you stand and dink in the hearty and granden of the everchanging glory of the hills about us mithant feeling something of the atter insignificance of war," We stand one some well chosen sfort, and look about us, he toke in at one forel sung the gravel favorawa of notice about us, its greatures, its the mendous former that en ligt great worm tains, its infinite faticie the con service through

of years in slowly meaning the wormtains down to hills, and by the slow forces of vain and port, - its unhimited wariety, von the worm boking day, over the terrible mind and rain, new the blintering. minter storm - all there speak of a former so great and transcendent, that we alwart institutively shink bock expecting to see the gust efinit descend ofice us from serve distant mountain feak, and speak with a for voice as terrible as um even heard. What are you that ye think that I am uniclove of your? But the forl with his terrible wogerty does out come, and som we are lost in the leave of meditation, that comes over one as he stands before the shrine of nature. The minclows and doors of the sort of the spirit flows in, the sove is filled

and feetly from the depths of our being me atter the simple words. How would fel it is ." At but the chirine silence of one being corner the fort who speaks within soying to us. Tane I woole all this hearty and worken: worked in which you live, but you! you I made with the former to understand see to understind, to speak, and with the simple words of wonder and hearty to expans thoughts and truths that are sterval. For you I have given the former to think over again my thoughts after me." Have me sunt fait company with the Colvinist, with him we are see the truth of the sonaignty of God; with him me are see the truth of won's defendance of a good, but he has built his system in such a logical wy, that he had failed to look into the humon sort, he had failed to recognize the Divine fomer working its way to light

in the micht of a struggling hofeful 112 humity. The real meaning of the avoid of Jesur of hayareth, I and my Father are one " had vot truched his logical sone, and given his dark and workid mind the light of two spiritivolity. We fast compray with him here hecause me clare to suy as forms did I and my Father are me" This is the tinch. this is the gleave of truth that that destroys for: ever the glooning fersionism of the dying system. More this truth, that you and I done to say I and my fother are one" serts the the ligh obligation of obschieves to the will of good, not an abechieve born of fear, or a sense of meakness in the fresence of a former so great, but an obedience born of the forfound respect of our our Divine votime, and strengthered and made nilol by the real fresence of God in the human sore.

Obechince to the Mill of God! Do me mean by 113 that the conformity to thre lows which every where me with an dren hoved the things of notice. Flore lows which the earth is words avel in accordance with which the seasons serve and go, answer line and die. It wwell he a ware ware of words to speak of such obechieves. Whether we will a vo we are a fast of notive, such as such me must conform to her lows. Mich the dust at one feet we share in the obechive To that low which birds into a system the Mirnere. with The animals who minister to our veeds we ahave mith the lover of the generation life, and cleath. but hy one ister an me escope there steward, even active lows by which in courson with earth stores, accimals of every form me became a fart and farcel of the things about us. Tort have do we find that abeching to the

will of Gool, which is the very heart of " Stiel Juther that highert obeclieves is not identical with, or to be confined with That obechience which were for the social and word loves which gover our clarly conclust is to a large extent governed. These lows also have their authority, and demand one obeclieve, and we disolary at the fire of an social and word mells being, It consists wat in the sameful and fainstoking obechive which we for to the dictations of another ferrer a books a institution that freesames to be a mediation between the humm som and good. all there forms of obeclience from the obeclience to the natural low awhich we comot everfe to the obedience To the highert word lows, which me con escope fails of reaching that highert and

and worst complete abechine to the Diving line . the abechive which is the serve of the face that fourth understanding. what the obechience is in he easily seen by one who sheeps, but to express it in terms of worch, so The another way see is difficult. It consists in the first flace of that seef alwegation, or rother that self assertion of the spinitore formers which lights one above all considerations of the day and the bour in which one hires. the secure to free himself from his tory to become a free agent of the spiritore world, It is some Thing like the fuling which comes one one by the sea store, In sit for hours at some afort and worth the courseles rise and foll of the wover, to be helder into a half slumber by the suish of the heating worses on they chase each other of and down the for beach, until forsely it seems enif come

The store line in the chistame becomes clim. and we seem to become a fast of the great reaselers restlers arean, The world about us is forgottion, that activity and dertres so charact trustic is farsed, and our soul to give on a journey to the infinite. This is the feeling that comes one us accossionally as we ofen the minclorin of one sere in the fierence of the great sivine world. Fur this strange nacant like feeling as if all the commencionary former of ou being had bet us, we are awokened by the guring consciousness of the persone within us of a former, greater the one our, It seems to fill every swollest secluded work of one being just as the incoving Ticks field the wort sewer te creek of the bay. Two thoughts, high and woble conceptions of life affect to us.

We are in the real fresence of god, and see (1) our own time wollert self as clearly and as ferfectly, as an object in one havel. It is as of me took a formerful telescofe, and by its means hought the distut wormtain to me feet that we way examine it. At such woments it seems as if we are structing by the side of the way withing the great any of woble sones marching fearlendy to the life of frace that foreth all andertowling. We are lead by an almost ineristable singere to leaf into the thing, to be born along by the Tick of disine heings, respending without a thought of horking backword, to that expit de corfs, which her carried so wry ont their dissotrs fortran avel discontent, in the The fue spicitive obedience to the will god the god where wiel it is That each human being shoel fiel as Jesus did, that the sure and the Father are one" Could me but give on selfe of to the voice that commonals

to the highert that speaks within us in the woments when the runching of our sort have been ofened and the sont has been field by the real fressence there would soul rise in its ungat and free it self from the enlinghing claims of things that wit and with comps. huich that formen our daily sife would become Transformed, such to the orchinany duties of life me would quie a joyous obechines, for though them is the real life lined.

Obedience to the Will of God

Earl Clement Davis

Pittsfield, MA

No Date¹

Scripture:

Text: "I and my Father are One."2

I wish to speak on obedience to the will of God, and its relation to our moral and spiritual life. In what does it consist? What are its fruits?

Two hundred years have not yet passed since Jonathan Edwards and his followers blew upon the dying embers of Calvinism and caused them to burst forth into the last flickering flame, before its vitality had burned out and left nothing but the cold lifeless ashes of history.³ Yet that last flickering flame of a dying religious system contained a power and a vividness, a warmth from which many a soul received the quickening impulse to a deeper and more spiritual life. Whatever may have been the limitations under which Edwards interpreted his religious experiences, the fact remains that he had been touched by the power of the spiritual life. He had responded to the command of the first great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind and will all thy soul."4 But the second commandment had not touched him deeply. He did not, and could not love his neighbor as himself. He had not gone deep enough, or sympathetically enough into the nature and purposes of the human heart to really give more than formal assent to the command, "Thou

² John 10:30.

¹ While this manuscript has no date, there are internal references—see below—that strongly suggest this sermon was preached while Earl Davis was minister of the Unity Church in Pittsfield, MA.

³ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) a New England preacher who advocated a more conservative direction as opposed to his fellow New Englander, Charles Chauncy (1705-1787). See Earl Davis' notes on Edwards and Chauncy among the Harvard era manuscripts. ⁴ Matthew 22:37.

shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."⁵ His intellectual surroundings were subject to influences that made this impossible.

Should we analyze that last flame of Calvinism, sometimes spoken of as the Berkshire Divinity, should we analyze it as the chemist analyzes the flames that burn from the substance in his crucible, we would find that it gives evidence of three great elements. The first element, the foundation and cementing substance of the whole system, the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. This doctrine seems to be an indication of the triumph of a more sensible opinion of the earlier superstitions of New England which formulated a quite clearly defined dualism, as illustrated in the dramatic struggles between God and the Devil.

This doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God is strangely suggestive of, if not prophetic of the results which modern scientists have been dealing out to us for the last few years. The absolute sovereignty of natural law, its universal, and unquestionable activity, bespeaks of an over-ruling power as sovereign and as absolute as ever Edwards or Hopkins or Emmons dreamed of.⁶ Upon this point of the absolute sovereignty of God, the Berkshire Divinities were not so far wrong, if our most modern conceptions have any value.

The second great truth of Calvinism was man's dependence upon God. This is quite in keeping with the most advanced scientific and philosophical notions. When the scientist tells us that there is not one atom of matter in all the universe that is outside the reign of law, when the moralist tells us that every act of a human being must conform in one way or another to the eternal laws of conduct, we are listening to a doctrine of man's dependence upon God set forth in no less exacting terms than the same idea was treated at the hands of Edwards.

So far we can agree as to the essential idea of Calvinism, although we must take exception to the forms in which this idea was expressed, forms which were colored and distorted by the third element which is found in Calvinism. This third element is the one which makes the whole system

⁵ Matthew 22:39.

⁶ Nathaniel Emmons (1745-1840); Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803). Both influential New England Congregational preachers.

obnoxious and revolting, and which was no small factor in causing the onward movement to leave Calvinism behind. The notions of total depravity, and the atonement through Christ, and all the ideas connected therewith are based upon a profound pessimism. If you stop to think of it, the entire system of ideas centering about the explation of Christ and the doctrine of election, is simply another way of expressing the feelings of the man who thinks that everything is in a bad way, and all things are on the high road to ruin. The true pessimist always reasons from the dire calamity which is about to overtake the multitude, a way of escape for himself and a chosen few. So also did the Calvinists, the few elected to be saved, would, by the grace of God through Christ, enter into eternal peace and gloat over their happy fate. This is a true thoroughgoing pessimism, the last and most complete expression of a pessimism that has been lurking in the system called Christianity since very early days. Perhaps it came from the East, and was absorbed into mechanical Christianity, as it was undergoing its transformation from its earliest days of spiritual power into its essentially unspiritual system.

The old system is passing away. Holmes' wonderful "One-Hoss Shay" is a pointed description of Calvinism.⁷ It was built in such a logical way, that it must collapse. There was no opportunity for repairs. Now it has become hardly more than a faint recollection of a bad dream. Even the most Calvinistic of this generation have not the courage and daring to proclaim the doctrines of this wonderfully logical system. Yet much of the old phraseology and many of the terms are still used but they are so twisted, modified and repainted that one feels that those who use them have not the slightest conception of the strength and ruggedness of the outworn system. They are destroying the historic charm which might center about the remains of "the Wonderful One Hoss Shay" by trying to work them up into timber for a carriage of the modern world. To use a figure from the words of Jesus, they are putting new wine into old bottles which still retain their old labels. Once these bottles contained a live sparkling wine, discolored to be

⁷ Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) published his poem "The Deacon's Masterpiece or, the Wonderful 'One-Hoss Shay:' A Logical Story" in the Atlantic Monthly for 1858. It was reprinted in an 1897 collection of writings by Holmes, The Wonderful "One-Hoss-Shay" and other Poems. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co.

sure, by a brackish pessimism, but still vital. But the wine has been lost and the bottles have been filled by a flat, colorless, insipid water of sentimentalism. If we must have the old bottles and old labels, pray! let us have the old wine also. It was a powerful stimulant to the elect who could drink it.

The Sovereignty of God! and Man's Dependence upon God! Is it possible that the leaders of the Berkshire Divinity absorbed those truths from the very spirit of these mountains? Overcome by the transcendent glory, by the overshadowing power of God as revealed by the rugged everchanging scenery in the midst of which he lived, did he look upon himself as the most insignificant, the most unworthy of beings, what at best could but faintly utter, "How terribly wonderful?" Can you stand and drink in the beauty and grandeur of the everchanging glory of the hills about us without feeling something of the utter insignificance of man?⁸

We stand on some well-chosen spot, and look about us. We take in at one full sweep the grand panorama of nature about us, its greatness, its tremendous power that can lift great mountains, its infinite patience that can consume thousands of years in slowly wearing the mountains down to hills, by the slow process of rain and frost, it unlimited variety, now the warm bakery day, now the terrible wind and rain. Now the blistering winter storm, all these speak of a power so great and transcendent that we almost instinctively shrink back, expecting to see the great spirit descend upon us from some distant mountain peak, and speak with a voice as terrible as man ever heard. "What are you that ye think that I am mindful of you?" But the God with his terrible majesty does not come, and soon we are lost in the trance of meditation, that comes over one as he stands before the shrine of nature. The windows and doors of the soul open, the spirit flows in, the soul is filled, and feebly from the depths of our being we utter the simple words, "How wonderful it is?" Into the divine silences of our being comes the God who speaks within, saying to us, "I made all this beauty and wonder-world in which you live. But you! You! I made with the power to see, to understand, to speak, and with the simple words of wonder and beauty to

⁸ These references to the Berkshire mountains are a strong suggestion that this sermon was delivered while Earl Davis was the minister of the Unity Church in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

express thoughts and truths that are eternal. To you I have given the power to think over again my thoughts after me."

Here we must part company with the Calvinist. With him we can see the truth of the sovereignty of God; with him we can see the truth of man's dependence upon God. But he has built his system in such a logical way that he had failed to look into the human soul, he had failed to recognize the Divine power working its way to light in the midst of a struggling hopeful humanity. The real meaning of the words of Jesus of Nazareth, "I and my Father are one" had not touched his logical soul, and given his dark and morbid mind the light to true spirituality. We part company with him here because we dare to say as Jesus did, "I and my Father are one." This is the touch. This is the gleam of truth that destroys forever the gloomy pessimism of the dying system.

Upon this truth, that you and I dare to say, "I and my Father are one" rests the high obligation of obedience to the will of God. Not an obedience born of fear, or a sense of weakness in the presence of a power so great. But an obedience born of the profound respect of our own Divine nature, and strengthened and made vital by the real presence of God in the human soul.

Obedience to the Will of God! Do we mean by that the conformity to those laws which everywhere rule with an iron hand the things of nature? Those laws according to which the earth is made and in accordance with which the seasons come and go, animals live and die. It would be a mere mass of words to speak of such obedience. Whether we will or not, we are a part of nature, and as such we must conform to her laws. With the dust at our feet we share in the obedience to that law which binds into a system the Universe. With the animals who minister to our needs we share the laws of generation, life and death. Not by one iota can we escape these eternal, ever active laws by which, in common with [the] earth, stones, animals of every form, we become a part and parcel of things about us. But here do we find that obedience to the will of God, which is the very heart of the highest and best of the religious life. Still further that highest obedience is not identical with, or to be confused with, that obedience which men pay to the social and moral laws by which our daily conduct is, to a large extent, governed. These laws also have their authority, and demand our obedience, and we disobey at the

peril of our social and moral wellbeing. It consists not in the careful and painstaking obedience which we pay to the dictates of another person or book or institution that presumes to be a mediator between the human soul and God. All these forms of obedience from the obedience to the natural laws which we cannot escape to the obedience to the highest moral laws, which we can escape, fails of reaching that highest and most complete obedience to the Divine Will, that obedience which is the source of the peace that passeth understanding. What that obedience is can be easily seen by one who obeys, but to express it in terms of words, so that another may see is difficult. It consists in the first place of the self-abnegation, or rather that selfassertion of the spiritual powers which lifts one above all considerations of the day and the hour in which one lives. One seems to free himself from his body to become a free agent of the spiritual world. It is something like the feeling which comes over one by the sea shore. To sit for hours at some spot and watch the ceaseless rise and fall of the waves, to be lulled into a half slumber by the swish of the breaking waves as they chase each other up and down the beach, until finally the shoreline in the distance become dim, and we seem to become a part of the great ceaseless, restless ocean. The world about us is forgotten, that activity and alertness so characteristic is passed, and our soul has gone on a journey to the infinite. This is the feeling that comes over us occasionally as we open the windows of our soul in the presence of the great Divine world.

From this strange vacant-like feeling, as if all the common ordinary powers of our being had left us, we are awakened by the growing consciousness of the presence within us of a power, greater than our own. It seems to fill every smallest secluded nook of our being just as the incoming tide fills the most remote creek of the bay. Now thoughts, high and noble conceptions of life, appear to us. We are in the real presence of God, and see our own true noblest self as clearly and as perfectly, as an object in our hand. It is as if we took a powerful telescope, and by its means brought the distant mountain to our feet that we may examine it.

At such moments it seems as if we are standing by the side of the way watching the great army of noble souls marching fearlessly to the life of peace that passeth all our understanding. We are led by an almost irresistible

impulse to leap into the thing, to be born along by the tide of divine beings, responding without a thought of looking backward, to that esprit de corps which has carried so many out [of] their dissatisfaction, and discontent, into the true free spiritual obedience to the Will of God, the God whose will it is that each human being shall feel as Jesus did, that "the soul and the Father are one." Could we but give our [own] selves up to the voice that commands to the highest that speaks within us in those moments when the windows of our soul have been opened and the soul has been filled by the real presence, there would [the] soul rise in its might and free itself from the entangling claims of things that rust and {???} corrupt. With that power, our daily life would become transformed, and to the ordinary duties of life we would give a joyous obedience, for through them is the real life lived.