

THE PULPIT.

A BRILLIANT SUNDAY SERMON BY THE REV. D. H. OVERTON.

Subject: God's Obligation to Man.

Brooklyn, N. Y.—The Rev. Daniel H. Overton, pastor of Greene Avenue Reformed Church, preached Sunday night in the Bushwick Avenue Reformed Church at the union services with His own congregation. The subject was, "God's Obligation to Man." The text was from II. Timothy, 1:9: "Who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Jesus Christ before times eternal, but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ." Mr. Overton said:

There is the law of God and there is the gospel of God. Often have I spoken of the law of God, now I would speak of the gospel of law. The law of God may be defined as that which expresses God's obligation to God, and the gospel of God as that which expresses God's obligation to man. The Old Testament and the New Testament unite in this, that they give not only the law of God, but the gospel of God. It is this fact that makes the Hebrew religion and the Christian religion different from all the other religions of the world. Many other religions give directly or indirectly the law of God, but none of them gives the gospel of God thus defined as the obligation of God to man. The gods of the heathen nations round about the Hebrew nation were of such a nature that they must be appeased and pleased by worship and sacrifice on the part of man or they would torment and crush man. The law of the gods must be obeyed, but only that man might escape the punishment of the gods, and not from any particular love of man for the gods.

It is strange how this heathen conception of the gods has crept into the thought of so many about the true and living God. He, too, in the thought of many, is a God that must be appeased and pleased by worship and sacrifice or He will punish and torment and crush men. Men must obey the laws of God or perish by them. This is, of course, true as far as it goes. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Men cannot sin with impunity. Man is responsible to God, and under obligations to Him to keep His law and do His will. We must never forget this, nor get far away from this in our thought of God. But we must not stop with this thought. If we do we will have only a partial view of God—we will have only a heathen god.

And if we have only a partial God or a heathen god, then we shall have only a partial or a heathen religion. If fear is our only motive in religion or worship, then our religion and worship will be for the purpose of escaping the wrath of an angry God, and it will find expression in our attempts to appease and please an angry God by propitiations and atonements, and sacrifices. We must rise above fear, and even above the thoughts of future rewards, to love, and to the thought of loving, loyal service, and present rewards in doing something to hasten the coming of God's kingdom upon the earth. We must rise above the obligation of man to God, as expressed by law, and think of the obligation of God to man as expressed by love and the gospel of love. We must think of the gospel of God as well as of the law of God. This will not belittle our respect for the law of God, nor in any way lower our sense of obligation to Him.

Daniel Webster, when asked what was the greatest thought that ever entered his mind, replied, you remember, that it was the thought of man's responsibility to God. That certainly is a great thought, and yet the one I bring you to-day is greater. God's obligation to man is, I believe, the greatest thought that can enter the mind of man.

This thought of God's obligation to man is newer than the thought of man's obligation to God. It may be new to many of you who are here to-day. There are some, I expect, who will deny that God is under any obligation to man whatsoever, and some of you may be among that number, but I believe that the thought is true, even if it is new, and that is why I proclaim it to you to-day.

God's obligation to man is the great gospel of God to man. The gospel is good news, and what better news is there in all the world for man than this—that God, the God of infinite love and Fatherhood, is under obligations to him? Let us see if this is a fact, and if we find it so, let that fact rest in our minds and bless our lives evermore.

First, look at our human relationships for proof of the fact. Children have obligations to their parents, but parents have obligations to their children also. My boys are under obligations to me, but I am under obligations to my boys—also. Why? Because I am their father, with a father's heart and a father's interest. I cannot leave them to perish until all my fatherly resources are exhausted for their good. So God, by becoming the Father of the human family, has placed Himself under obligation to the whole human family. The very meaning of the word religion implies this. Religion, true religion, is that which binds a man to God in right relationship. Which is it that binds a man closest to God? Is it man's obligation to God, or is it God's obligation to man? I believe it is the latter. Close as the law may bind man to God, love binds him yet closer.

Now, all true human relationships involve obligations on both sides, and from both parties to the relationship. God has always acknowledged His obligation to man, even if man has not always acknowledged his obligation to God. What is a covenant but an obligation on the part of two or more people? God has made many covenants with individuals and with His chosen people. He made covenants with Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David and

with many others that we might mention. He made covenants with the nation of Israel and of Judah again and again. These covenants implied the obligation of God to man, as well as man's obligation to God, else they would not have been covenants, but simply laws. These covenants are the gospel of the Old Testament and of the Hebrew religion. This gospel of God's obligation to man unites the Old and New Testaments as one book and as the book of one true religion, and the revelation of one great gospel, the gospel of God as a covenant making and a covenant keeping God, loving man and doing all that infinite love can do for man's salvation. Says Dr. Abbott: "The Old Testament is the gospel of the obligation of God to man in the bud; the New Testament is the gospel of God's obligation to man in the flower."

There is no doubt, I think, about the fact of God's obligation to man. It is really the central fact of the Old and New Testament alike. It is the very gospel of God in His great book from beginning to end, if only we interpret that book aright!

But before we boast of that gospel, or pride ourselves that God is under obligations to us, let us seek to know the ground of that obligation. Let us know that we have not put God under any obligation to us by anything we have done. "Not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace," Paul says in the text. It is therefore God's own purpose and active love, for grace is love in action, that has put God under obligation to man. "God so loved"—and there it all began—this gospel of God's obligation to man. God so loved that He voluntarily and out of His great love, and for no other reason, placed Himself under obligation to the whole world of humanity, so that whosoever in that world would believe in that love, and would let God fulfil His obligation toward him, should not perish, but be saved. This is John iii:16, in the light of our text and in the words of our theme. This is the gospel that Jesus Christ came to proclaim and to live. He came to tell every man that God so loves him that He is willing to place Himself under obligations to him. It was for this reason that God gave us His greatest gift—the gift of Himself in Jesus Christ—as much of Himself and even more than man would or could comprehend and believe in. It is because He is the great loving universal Father that He has placed Himself under obligation to every child of His, to every man and woman in all the world.

Be this our boast then: not that we have put God under any obligation to us by anything that we have done, but that God out of His infinite love for us and according to His own loving and eternal purpose has placed Himself under obligations to us. This purpose was given us in Jesus Christ, "before times eternal," Paul says. That is, it was born in God's eternal Father-Heart before time came to be reckoned or counted. God ever a Father must ever have had a Son, else He would not have been ever a Father, and in that love for that eternal Son we see God's purpose for all His sons in all the world. And this purpose has now been manifested to the world and to us by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. That is, Christ came to show God's, the Father's, eternal purpose to the world. He came to tell the world that He has been willing to place Himself under obligation to every one in all the world. This is the gospel that Christ came to proclaim. This is the gospel that shines forth in all that He said or did.

And now we are ready to see what this obligation of God to us and His eternal purpose, has led Him to do for us, or the result of His obligation to man. What is the issue of this gospel of God's obligation? What has it led God to do for us? It has led and it will lead God to do everything that infinite love can do or that we will let Him do for our salvation. The first part of the text gives this answer: "Who saved us, and called us with a holy calling." He has called us to salvation and to holiness through faith in Him, as the loving Father, and in His Son, as the revealer and example of the Father's love and character. This is the covenant that God waits and wants to make with every one of us. It is not His will that any should perish, but that all should receive the light of life, and live the life that is abundant and eternal. It was God's obligation to us, born of His love for us, that led Him to send Christ to suffer and die for us, in order that He might become our Saviour and lead us to salvation and to holiness. It was this that led God to do the very best that He out of His infinite power and love could do for us and for all of His children of the earth. Ah, yes, we may be sure of this—God has kept, and God will ever keep, His part of the covenant that He has made with us and for us. He has fulfilled and He ever will fulfil, His full obligation to us.

This is the gospel of the Old and New Testament that I proclaim to you to-day. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ—the gospel of God's obligation to man born of God's great love for man.

The Sinfulness of Sin.

Unhappily that "secularization of morals," which the late Herbert Spencer proclaimed to be imperative, necessary, has already made some progress. The tendency to minimize sin—by characterizing it, not as a personal crime against God, but rather as "indiscretion," a "disease," or as the inevitable result of "heredity" in irresponsible persons—is developing in quarters where there ought to be clearer and more accurate views of life. There can be no successful sin. It may be hidden from man, and only from man, but in the divine order its inevitable result is death (Rom. 6:23), and no preacher can be true to his Master who fails to declare that immutable truth.—London Christian.

How to Understand.

Obey Jesus with cordial loyalty and you will understand Jesus. Not by studying Him, but by doing His will, shall you learn how divine He is. Obedience completes itself in understanding.—Phillips Brooks.

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JURY WAS EXPERIENCED. "Flatman, I hear you were arrested the other day for insulting and browbeating a janitor. How did you come out?" "I was tried for it and acquitted." "On the ground that it was justifiable?" "No; the jury couldn't be made to believe such a thing was possible."—Chicago Tribune.

A TERROR. Fond Mother—I wonder sometimes what Bertrand's occupation in life will be when he grows up. Impartial Visitor—Well, I don't know, of course, but from what I have observed of him since I have been here, if he gets his deserts he will lead the line in the lock-step parade twice a day to and from the shops.—Somerville Journal.

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