

"Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"

Ps. 119:5

The Lord has indeed "*commanded us to keep his precepts.*" But, alas! where is our power? Satan would make the sense of our weakness an excuse for indolence. The Spirit of God convinces us of it, as an incitement to prayer, and an exercise of faith. If, Reader, your heart is perfect with God, you "*consent to the law that it is good;*" you "*delight in it after the inner man*" (Rom. vii. 16, 22); you would not have one jot or tittle altered, mitigated, or repealed, that it might be more conformed to your own will, or allow you more liberty of self-indulgence in the ways of sin. But do you not sigh to think, that, when you aim at the perfect standard of holiness, you should, at your best moments, and in your highest attainments, fall so far below it; seeing indeed the way before you, but feeling yourself without ability to walk in it? Then let a sense of your helplessness for the work of the Lord lead you to the throne of grace, to pray, and watch, and wait, for the strengthening and refreshing influences of the Spirit of grace. Here let your faith realize at one and the same view your utter insufficiency, and your complete All-sufficiency. (2 Cor. iii. 5.) Here behold Him, who is ever presenting himself before God as our glorious Head, receiving in himself, according to the good pleasure of the Father (Col. i. 18, 19), the full supply for this and every successive moment of inexpressible need. Our work is not therefore left upon our own hands, or wrought out at our "*own charges.*" So long as "*He hath the residue of the Spirit*" (Mal. ii. 15), "*grace*" will be found "*sufficient;*"--Divine "*strength will be made perfect in weakness.*" (2 Cor. xii. 9.) "*Without him we can do nothing*" (John, xv. 5); "*through him, all things.*" (Phil. iv. 13.) Even the "*worm Jacob shall thresh the mountains,*" when the Lord says, "*Fear not, I will help thee.*" (Isa. xli. 14, 15.)

In connecting this verse with the preceding, how accurately is the middle path preserved, equally distant from the idea of self-sufficiency to "*keep the Lord's statutes,*" and self-justification in neglecting them! The first attempt to render spiritual obedience will quickly convince us of our utter helplessness. We might as soon create a world, as create in our hearts one pulse of spiritual life. And yet our inability does not cancel our obligation. Shall God lose his right, because sin has palsied our ability? Is not a drunken servant still under his master's law? and is not the sin which prevents him from performing his duty, not his excuse, but his aggravation? Thus our weakness is that of an heart, which "*cannot be subject to the law of God,*" only because it is carnal, "*enmity against God.*"¹ The obligation therefore remains in full force. Our inability is our sin, our guilt, and condemnation.

What then remains for us, but to return the mandate to heaven, accompanied with an earnest prayer, that the Lord would write upon our hearts those *statutes*, to which he requires obedience in his word?--"*Thou hast commanded us to keep thy statutes diligently.*" We acknowledge, Lord, our obligation; but we feel our impotency. Lord, help us: we look unto thee. "*Oh that our ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*" "*Give what thou commandest; and then command what thou wilt*" (Augustine). Now, as if to exhibit the

¹ Rom. viii. 7. Comp. Gen. xxxvii. 4; John, viii. 43; v. 40; 2 Pet. ii. 14,--where the moral inability is clearly traced to the love of sin, or the obstinate unbelief of the heart, and therefore is inexcusable. The case of the heathen is traced to the same wilful source. (Rom. i. 20-28.)

fulness and suitableness of the promises of the gospel, the commands and prayers are returned back again from heaven with promises of quickening and directing grace. Thus does the Lord fully answer his end with us. He did not issue the commands, expecting that we could turn our own hearts to them; but that the conviction of our entire helplessness might cast us upon him, who loves to be sought, and never will be thus sought in vain. And indeed this is a part of the "mystery of godliness," that in proportion as we depend upon him who is alike, "the Lord our righteousness," and our strength, our desire after holiness will increase, and our prayers become more fervent. He who commands our duty, perfectly knows our weakness, and he who feels his own weakness is fully encouraged to depend upon the power of his Saviour. Faith is then the principle of evangelical obedience, and the promises of his grace enable us for duty, at the very time that we are commanded to it. In this view are brought together the supreme authority of the Lawgiver, the total insufficiency of the creature, the full provisions of the Saviour, and the all-sufficiency of "the God of grace." We pray for what we want; we are thankful for what we have; we trust for what is promised. Thus "all is of God." Christ "is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." (Rev. xxii. 13.) Thus "grace reigns" triumphant. The foundation is laid in grace, and the headstone will be brought forth with shoutings, crying, "Grace, grace unto it." (Zech. iv. 7.) The Saviour's work is finished, and Jesus is crowned Lord of all for ever.