

# OBEDIENCE

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*At the moment you acknowledge Jesus as Lord of your life, obedience to God became a real possibility. You have been freed from slavery to sin. As you appropriate God's provision for victory, you can experience a life of obedience. You are not alone.*

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## Disciples who follow Jesus...

- Have a deep desire to glorify God. *Isaiah 26:8*
- Strive to continually elevate Jesus above family, self, and everything else. *Luke 14:26,33*
- Are willing to bear their cross and follow Jesus. *Matthew 16:24*
- Must learn to use God's provision for victory over sin and a life of obedience to Him. *Philippians 3:10*

## ... Therefore, your commitments are:

- Video: "[Motivations for Obedience](#)" by Matt Chandler (48 min.)
- Bible Study: Use the Inductive Method (Appendix) to study the memory verses.
- Read chapter 11 in BIFSG as a group and discuss afterwards with Q&A the questions at the end of the chapter.
- Prepare your heart to listen and learn. In applying HA #7, ask your D-group leader and at least one other leader in your life to answer the following questions:
  - Am I willing and eager to support your directions and plans?
  - Do I act in the best interests of my leaders?
  - Do I support your leadership always, usually, or only when I agree with it?
  - Am I generally a joy to lead, a pain to lead, or somewhere in between?
- Write down your leader's responses from the previous commitment and share them with your group in a way that is consistent with HA #2 (living openly and honestly).
- Memorize **one** of the following verses about lovingly following Jesus:
  - John 14:21 with topic: Obedience
  - James 1:22 with topic: Obedience and Application
  - 1 Peter 1:14-15 with topic: Obedience and Perseverance
- Meditate: HA #1 and supporting verse Philippians 2:3-4
- Write down and share your KEY THOUGHT with your small group
- Seek God's Face in His Word throughout the week Ps. 27:8
- Attend CV, take notes, and write down at least one "key thought"

## **BEFORE YOU MOVE ON:**

What is it about God that compels you to lovingly follow Him in obedience to His Word to you? (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15)

## Basic Ingredients for Spiritual Growth

# Chapter 11: Obedience

Obedience is not automatic. A lifestyle of obedience to the Word of God begins with a deep commitment. And one of the clearest passages in Scripture that brings out this point is found in the writings of the Apostle Peter, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy!’ “ (1 Peter 1:13- 16)

God’s grand design for His people is twofold. First, that we live a lifestyle of obedience and second, that we may take on more and more of His likeness day by day. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

In order to do this, we must gird up the loins of our minds. Now I realize that sounds a bit strange to our ears, but to the people of the Middle East who wore long flowing robes, it made perfect sense. If you saw a man heading down the road with his long flowing robe hiked up under his belt, you knew he was not out for a leisurely stroll. To gird up the loins of the mind indicates you mean business; it is like taking off your coat and rolling up your sleeves. You are getting ready for a tough task. It is not the picture of a slow drive through the countryside, but of an ambulance heading for the emergency room.

But not only must you live a surrendered life but also a focused life. There are distractions of every kind that call us to leave the path of obedience and expend our energies looking for an easier road, a smoother road, a broader road. Peter tells us that it would be a disgraceful thing for people whose motive is obedience to turn around and go back to the sins of a former time. Nevertheless, those allurements are there, so we must fix our minds on the paths of obedience and keep them there.

When I was living on my brother’s farm in Southwest Iowa, it would often be my task to cultivate the corn. We had two teams of horses Molly and Bess, and Bud and Nance. Molly and Bess were older and knew exactly what was expected of them. If we started them down the cornrow, they stayed in it. Bud and Nance, however, were easily distracted. They had a tendency to gaze around the field and meander off the path. For that reason we put blinders on them to keep them focused in the right direction. A deep, bedrock commitment to a lifestyle of obedience has the same effect. It is something the Spirit of God can use to help us press toward the mark. Obedience is not automatic.

### Holy Obedience

The Apostle Peter goes on to call us to a life of holiness—a life that is set apart for God’s service. And a holy life finds its example in God Himself. The children of disobedience we find in Ephesians 2:2 have now been transformed by the Spirit of God into children of obedience who reproduce the family lifestyle of holiness.

To live as a Christian does not mean merely accepting a system of doctrine as true. No, to live as a Christian is to experience the controlling power of God in your life

on a day-by-day basis. Paul taught that “the kingdom of God is not in word but in

power” (I Corinthians 4:20). When God reaches into the hearts of people, they experience the divine power of His love, mercy, and grace. When you truly experience His saving power, you respond with true faith, true repentance, and true love.

Over the years I have had an ongoing conversation with a young man who knows all the right words. He can clearly articulate the Gospel message and has a verse of Scripture to fit almost any situation. The problem is that he has never experienced the controlling power of God in his life. His fine words are just that -- words. There is no reality in what he says. Somewhere along the line he was led to believe that if you could articulate the facts, that was the end of it. Obedience has never played an important role in his life. But Jesus taught, “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” (John 13:17). Knowledge plus obedience must accompany us on our daily path if we want to live a life of victory and fruitfulness in His service.

## **The Results of Obedience**

What should be the result of hearing the Word preached? In James 1:22 we are told, “Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” To be a hearer and not a doer is a form of self-deception. Jesus spelled out for us the way to a happy life that is lived under the blessing of God, “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.” Obedience should be the outcome of hearing the Word preached.

What should be the result of Bible reading? An interesting answer to this question is spelled out for us in the life of the Old Testament people of God. They had returned to Jerusalem from their captivity and one of the first things they did in assembly was to have a public reading of the Word. “So they read distinctly from the book, in the law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8). Later in that chapter a heartwarming scene occurs, where the people discover “that the Children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month” (v. 14). What was their response? Instant obedience. “The people went out and ... made themselves booths” (v. 16). Now I know that does not sound like much of a big deal. But think with me for a moment. What if everyone in your church responded with instant and joyful obedience when they read the Word or when the Word was read during the Sunday morning service? That’s what these people did. Yes, the result of reading the Word should be obedience.

What should be the result of Bible study? Proverbs 2:1-5 gives us guidance, “My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear unto wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” And the outcome of seeking and searching and heartfelt prayer is given in verse 20 -- “So you may walk in the way of goodness and keep the paths of righteousness.” Once again we see the importance God places on obedience to His Word.

What should be the result of Scripture memory? “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 30:14). I have a friend who came to Christ while he was in the Armed Forces. The Christian guys began to talk to him about memorizing the Word. He was eager to grow so they helped him get started. He had a remarkable mind and an insatiable hunger for the Word that resulted in his memorizing hundreds of verses the first year. It also resulted in a bad case of pride. He had a verse for everything. When a friend began a weightlifting program he

told him, "Bodily exercise profiteth little." If someone missed his quiet time, my friend was right there with, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." If one of the Christian guys enjoyed singing along when the Sons of the Pioneers sang the old western ballad "Cool Water," my friend had a verse for him. "Are any of you merry? Let him sing psalms." His Scripture memory resulted in pride and in his making a nuisance of himself. But the Bible says the result should be obedience.

## **The Necessity of Obedience**

A life of obedience is necessary if we are to enjoy other aspects of the Christian life.

*Obedience is necessary if we want to have close fellowship with God.* The Apostle John says, "This is the message which we have heard from Him, and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7). Our lives should reflect the Light of the World. But walking in God's light reveals our sins and shortcomings and thus we see our need for cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ His Son who cleanses us from all sin. If we think we can live in the dark, and at the same time have fellowship with the One in whom is no darkness at all, we deceive ourselves.

The Apostle Paul asked five questions of the Corinthians. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people' " (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). Sin always erects a barricade to try to keep us from close, intimate fellowship with God.

*Obedience is necessary for an effective prayer life.* The Apostle John tells us, "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). It seems to me that this verse explains the barrenness and the weakness of many prayer lives. Answered prayer is tied firmly to obedience. The promise made in 1 John 3:22 must, of course, be looked upon in the light of other portions of Scripture where God promises to hear and answer the prayers of His people. First John 5:14-15 is one of those: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." It seems to me that those who live in obedience to the will of God and keep His commandments are simply demonstrating that their wills are in sync with God and their prayers reflect that fact.

*Obedience is necessary if we want to be good witnesses for our Lord.* First Corinthians 15:34 says, "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." Our lives must stack up to what we say. Also note 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "For our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake." The apostles practiced what they preached. Your life can either weaken the message or reinforce it. The people God used to bring my wife and me to Christ lived a life of obedience and dedication to the Lord. We were

attracted by their lives, and their witness was used of God to bring us to Christ.

*Obedience is necessary if we are to abide in Christ's love.* The words of Jesus in John 15:10 bear this out. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." To abide in His love we must live lives of obedience. When Jesus speaks of abiding in His love, He is not attempting to lead us off into some ecstatic, spiritual rapture. It is simply a call to obedience. And in the next verse Jesus makes it clear that He is not trying to lead His followers into some joyless, barren lifestyle. Joy comes when we are totally committed to a life of obedience. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (v. 11).

*Obedience demonstrates our love for Christ.* "He who has My commandments and keeps them it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). In our songs we can *declare* our love for Jesus. In our prayers we can *declare* our love for Jesus. But it is through obedience that we *demonstrate* our love for Jesus. Remember, when we are born again into the kingdom of God, we have a King, a Lord. So what we are called upon to do is to find out what our King wants and then go and do that.

*Our obedience to the Lord is a primary means of helping younger Christians grow and develop in their Christian life.* We are to set the pace for those who are new in the faith. Paul wrote, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9). Paul's training of the church at Philippi was not only through his words but through his life. Even Jesus Himself did not rely on words alone in His training of the Twelve. The Bible tells us that no one ever spoke like Jesus, and yet even He did not say, "Listen to Me," but "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19).

*A life of obedience can do much to silence the enemies of the Cross.* Notice Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:15, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." These people are put to silence not by our arguing well, but by living well, by *doing* well. God often uses a godly life to attract people to the Savior. Admittedly, faith does not come by seeing, but by hearing. There must be that verbal witness. But the path to a verbal witness for Christ is often via a life that is lived in obedience to the will of God.

*A life of obedience brings glory to God.* "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). This brings obedience to a place of remarkable importance. The reason? Because the Lord has created us for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). Man's chief purpose for being on this earth is to glorify God. And one of the primary means of bringing honor and glory to God is to live a life of obedience to the will of God.

*A life of obedience evidences the fact that we truly know the Lord.* The Apostle Paul pointed out this truth to Titus when he wrote, "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16). They can talk all they want to, but their disobedient lives deny what they say. The Apostle John has some mighty strong words on this point. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:3-5).

*Obedience is the way to a happy, abundant, blessed life.* James tells us, "For if

anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:23-25) Did you happen to notice something strange in that passage? The Bible is called "the perfect law of liberty."

Now, I don't normally associate law with liberty. Law is more often associated with restraints than with freedom and liberty. When I am driving down the freeway and I see a highway patrol car, I automatically slow down no matter how fast or how slow I am traveling; my immediate reaction is to reduce my speed. Law and liberty do not seem to go hand in hand, but James says they do. In what way?

The train that jumps the tracks does not find liberty. Its so-called freedom has brought destruction and pain. When I was an employee of the Chicago Great Western Railroad, an old-timer told me that the rules governing the movement of trains were written in blood. In the past someone had done something that caused a train wreck, so they wrote a rule to try to insure that it would not happen again. The law of liberty was not given to restrict you but to lead you into the happy, abundant life.

I'm sure you know people who radiate the presence of the Lord. When you are with them you feel you are close to God. Shortly before his death at the age of ninety-six, my wife and I had the privilege of visiting Dr. Herbert Lockyer in his home. It was like being in the presence of the Lord Himself. This man had walked in fellowship with and obedience to the Lord Jesus for decades. The promise of Jesus had come true -- "he who has My commandments and keeps them ... I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). What greater joy could there be than to have our Lord Jesus reveal more and more of Himself to us. Moses reminded the people that if they would live in obedience to the Word of God, "The glory of the Lord will appear unto you" (Leviticus 9:6).

As we bring this chapter on obedience to a close, let me call your attention to Deuteronomy 30:19-20,

*I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.*

To learn the Word of God and then not obey the Word of God is to learn it in vain. Here are four questions to evaluate your obedience.

- Is it total or partial?
- Is it immediate?
- Is it joyful?
- Is it prompted by the right motives?