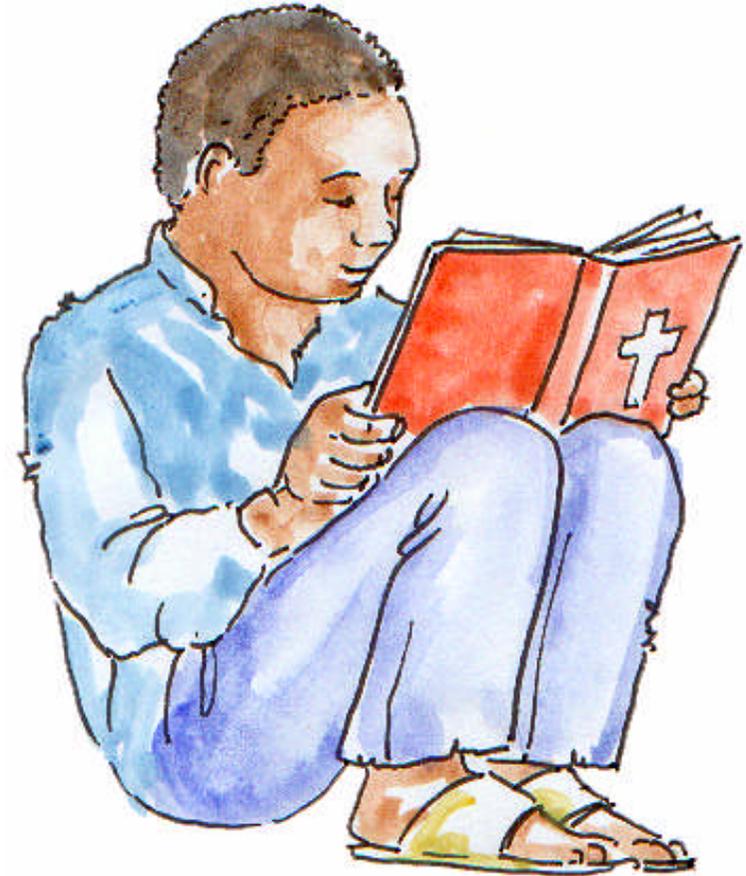


“Obedience”



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*Are you living a
life of obedience?*

by Pastor David Legge

“Obedience”

Looking under the heading of ‘Obedience’, our text is two verses from 1 Samuel 15, verses 22 and 23: *“And Samuel said, 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”.*

On one occasion many years ago in a Children’s Hospital, a little boy gained a reputation for wreaking havoc upon the nurses and all the medical staff. One day a visitor who knew the little boy made a deal with. She said ‘If you’re going to be good for a week, well, I’ll give you a pound when I come again. Is that a deal?’. He said: ‘Well, yep, it’s a deal. If I’m good for a week you’ll give me a pound’, and he agreed to it. A week later that same lady stood at the bottom of the young boy’s bed, and she said: ‘I tell you what, I’m not going to ask the nurses or the doctors or the medical team if you have behaved yourself, you must tell me yourself. Do you deserve one pound?’. From a little bundle underneath the sheets came this answer: ‘Just give me a penny’.

Now many of us feel a sense of failure when it comes to obedience to God’s word in our lives. If we’re honest with each other and with God and with ourselves, all of us, in some way, shape or form feel that we have missed the expectations that are outlined for us in the Scriptures, or perhaps in present-day Christian vogue. Now it’s true that we should never get to a point where we’re haughty or high-minded, where we’re proud and think we stand - because the apostle has told us very clearly that when we get to that point we need to take heed, lest we fall. The Lord Jesus, in the beatitudes, told us: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’, and we need to be humble if God’s going to exalt us. But there is around today a false humility with regards to obedience - what do I mean by false humility? Well, I mean this: there are people who will freely admit to you: ‘Look, I’m not what I should be as a Christian, I fall far short of everything that I know I ought to be’, but yet they are resigned and content to stay that way. In some kind of substandard fickle obedience to God, yes, they follow Christ half of the way, or three-quarters of the way, or 99% of the way, but just not all of the way - and they will admit it to you!

Maybe you’re reading this, and you will freely say: ‘Look, I know I’m not what I

Though this young man professed to be a Christian, he certainly didn’t live the Christian life. Torrey that evening watched for him, and tried to guess who he might be, and he thought he knew who he was; so he selected, as he thought, the right man and began to preach at him. At the close of the service he hurried to the door to greet everyone, and he shook the hands of the different people; and when that young man came out, he shook his hands and he said to him: ‘Good evening, I’m glad to see that you’re here! Are you a friend of Jesus?’. The young man said ‘Yes, I consider myself a friend of Jesus’. ‘Jesus said’, Torrey replied, ‘Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you’. His eyes fell, he said: ‘If those are the conditions, well, I guess I’m not one’.

Are you a friend of Jesus? Do you do whatever He commands you? On one occasion the Lord Jesus said to the disciples: ‘Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?’. I came across this poem this week, and I close with it. It’s as if the Lord Jesus is speaking to all of our hearts, it says:

‘Ye call Me Master and obey Me not;
 Ye call Me Light and see Me not;
 Ye call Me Way and walk Me not;
 Ye call Me Life and desire Me not;
 Ye call Me Wise and follow Me not;
 Ye call Me Fair and love Me not;
 Ye call Me Rich and ask Me not;
 Ye call Me Eternal and seek Me not;
 Ye call Me Gracious and trust Me not;
 Ye call Me Noble and serve Me not;
 Ye call Me Mighty and honour Me not;
 Ye call Me Just and fear Me not;
 If I condemn YOU, blame Me not’.

Jesus said: ‘If ye love me, keep my commands’.

Believer have you reached a dead-end in your life, you’ve lost the joy, you’ve lost the peace, you know that this isn’t how it should be - perhaps it is because there’s something that you know God wants you to do, and you just won’t do it? He wants to lead you, but you will not be led. Maybe you’re a backslider, and that’s why you have gone off the road, that obstacle - obey Him!

Repent and believe again in your Saviour!

by day, every hour of every day; 2) to enable this He has given us sufficient provision in the gift of His Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and as one has put it 'All heaven is waiting to help those who will discover the will of God and do it'. God has put Himself at your disposal! 3) That provision alone can be enjoyed by the soul that gives him or herself up to a life of abiding communion with God in His presence day by day.

I read a telling statement this week by Gary Colburnson, he said: 'One of the reasons people find it hard to be obedient to the commands of Christ, is that they are uncomfortable taking orders from a stranger'. Is that why you're not obeying the Lord today? Because He's a stranger to you? You see, obedience is the fruit, but the root of obedience is love. If you do not have a cultivating relationship of love with the Lover of your souls, the blessed Lord Jesus, you will never get to that point where obeying Him is an absolute delight and an absolute necessity

4) Entrance into this life demands a vow of absolute obedience, or the surrender of the whole being to God - that means to be whatever He wants you to be, to think whatever He wants you to think, to speak only that which He wants you to speak, to do every moment only His will. Simon, on one occasion after being dejected, thinking that all his dreams were drowned, was out with some of the disciples going back to their fishing nets. When a stranger at that time appeared to them, they said to Him: 'We have toiled all night and have taken nothing', but it was the Saviour and He spoke to them and gave them the command to cast their net on the other side. Peter reluctantly said: 'At thy word I will let down the net' - he was really saying 'Look, I think I know best because I have done this all my life, but I will obey You, I'll trust You that You're right'. The nets were almost breaking with fish.

Oswald Chambers said these remarkable words: 'The best measure of a spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience'. Martin Luther, that great reformer and martyr, said 'I had rather obey than work miracles'. Do you obey Him? It's the whole reason why you're saved. God dwells in the midst of His people's obedience, but He requires exact and entire obedience. It is the certificate of Christian character, it is the secret of a good conscience, it is the assurance of confident answered prayer - but if we are not completely obedient to Him we can be sure of none of those things.

Dr. R. A. Torrey, the evangelist, said that one evening, during one of his crusade meetings, he was told that a minister's son was to be present in the congregation.

should be, but I try my best in some factors within Christian life, and commandments, and rules, and principles' - but yet you're content where you are, you're not striving after that 100% complete dedication in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're like that, I would vouch to say that you have never seen or understood the prominent place that obedience has in God's Word; and you have never seen also the provision that God has made in His Son, and in the Christian gospel and life, for us to be enabled to obey God.

What I want to do is take this a step further and ask: are you walking in paths of obedience, using and tapping into the power that God has provided for you in Christ? Now I believe in the grace of God, and I believe that we underestimate the grace of God - and we, ourselves, here especially in Ulster, can verge on legalism, if not completely submerge ourselves in legalism, and forget the great principle that there is in grace - unmerited favour! I would also have to say that it is a misrepresentation of grace to think that grace permits us to be as disobedient as we like in our life, and you just get free forgiveness right away, and there's no consequences for the spiritual life and the spiritual fruit that you will bear. That is not grace! Paul says in retort to such an idea: 'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!'. We are called as Christians to obedience.

So I want us to look very, very briefly, but yet in a sense comprehensively, at the prominent place given to obedience in God's word. We want to start at the beginning of the Bible first of all, if you turn with me right back to Paradise, to Genesis chapter 2 - I'm going to make your fingers work turning to passages, but it's important that you understand the prominent place given to obedience in the Bible. Genesis 2 and verse 16: '*The LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat*'. Then in chapter 3 and verse 11, you will see what transpired, Adam and Eve's disobedience: '*And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?*'. Please note this, that right at the beginning of all time and creation, the beginning of all things, obedience is the one thing that was commanded of God to man. Please note further, that obedience was the one and only condition for Adam and Eve to abide in the Garden of Eden. That's so important: the one thing that the Creator of man right in the beginning asked of His creatures, was absolute obedience - nothing more and nothing less.

Please note in the first three or four chapters of the book of Genesis that outline creation and the fall of man, there's not a mention of faith, there's not a mention of humility, there's not even a mention of love, but the prime subject that God

brings to His first creatures is: 'You must obey me'. What is implied in that is that obedience incorporates love, humility, faith, and every spiritual virtue that exists can be under the umbrella of complete and absolute obedience to God.

We're starting right at the beginning and we're laying down the foundation of first mention here, that in the life of man, to obey was the one needful thing as far as God was concerned - that's right at the beginning of God's word. Now, we're going to look at some passages in between, but just to see that this is the constant message of the word of God, turn to Revelation 22, the last chapter in the Bible. Revelation 22 and verse 14, now I know there are variations in the translation of this verse: *'Blessed are they that do his commandments'*, some versions put it *'have washed their garments'*, yet washing your garments is a command of the Lord in itself, it is obedience to do such, so it has the same meaning in this context, *'that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city'*. Right at the end of the Bible, obedience to God's command is still asked of mankind. Now note this: from beginning to end, from Paradise lost in the Garden of Eden to Paradise regained in the eternal state of heaven, it is only obedience on both occasions that gives the right of access to the tree of life. So you can see how important obedience is.

Now you might think I'm preaching salvation by works, I am not; and therefore you might be asking the question: 'Well, how if there was disobedience at the beginning, and that closed the way to the tree of life, how all of a sudden has obedience gained access in the end, in the last chapter, to the tree of life in heaven. What caused this change?'. Well, here's your answer, turn to Romans 5 verse 19: *'For as by one man's disobedience'*, that is Adam, *'many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous'*. How can it be that the tree of life is closed to mankind because of their disobedience, and all of a sudden at the end of God's word and at the end of time it's open again - how can this possibly be when man is still a sinner? By one man's obedience, that is the obedience of Christ, He has bridged the gap from beginning to end by His cross and by His blood.

Isn't it wonderful today, make no mistake about it, that we do not rest for salvation upon our own obedience, but upon the obedience of another. Philippians 2 put it like this in verse 8, that He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross - and that was after His obedience in completely fulfilling the whole of God's law, every jot and tittle, and yet He died on the cross and was obedient to God's will. So what I want you to see right away at the beginning here is that the

prophecy and eschatology and all sorts of doctrines of God's word? If we believe that, do you know something? We have overlooked one of the basic simple teachings of our Lord Jesus, and it is this: obedience is the way of blessing!

John chapter 15:10, look at it, He says: *'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love'*, and He gives a divine sanction for it, *'even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love'*. Can you imagine this? For the Lord Jesus Christ Himself on this earth, and for us, the only way to abide in divine love is to keep His commandments. We haven't got time to look at that this, but we could look at the words of the apostles - Peter in Acts 2 preached on the day of Pentecost: *'God hath given His Holy Spirit to them that obey Him'*. In Romans, at the beginning and the end, Paul teaches that as the obedience of Christ has made us righteous, we become the servants of obedience. In other words, the gospel of grace that is outlined in the epistle of Paul to the Romans it is the restoration of the righteousness that was lost way back in the Garden of Eden. Christ on the cross has restored to us the ability to obey God - are we?

A. W. Tozer has said well: 'To escape the error of salvation by works, we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience - and there is no such a thing'. Another has said: 'When Christ takes the burden of guilt off a sinner's shoulders, He places the yoke of obedience upon his neck'. James, did he not teach us that we're not to be hearers of the word only, but doers of the same - and he expounds from the character of Abraham that he was justified, and his faith is perfect, by what? By his works in obedience. John the apostle tells us: 'He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar' - he goes on to say that obedience is one of the certain proofs of Christian character: 'Let us love in deed and truth, hereby we shall assure our hearts before Him; and whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things are pleasing in His sight'. In other words, the evidence of knowing God is obedience. It is also the secret of a good conscience and of confident prayer. Are you labouring in prayer for something that you need from God, and God's not giving you it? John Calvin put it like this: 'We cannot rely on God's promises without obeying His commands'. If you aren't in obedience God will never hear your prayer.

This is the place that obedience has in the Holy Scriptures, now here's the question that I ask from that: does it have the same prominent place in our lives? Can I share this with you as I close: 1) the Lord asks, and the Lord requires and actually expects every one of His children to yield absolute obedience to Him day

witness to people of Christ that you know are unsaved, you keep some of the commandments - i.e. you haven't committed adultery, you haven't murdered anybody - but the fact of the matter is, you know as well as I do, that you're obedience is only in measure, you're not doing all that God has asked of you! We say like Saul: 'But I have obeyed the Lord' - well, maybe you have obeyed the Lord, but could it be that we are protesting to God 'I have obeyed You', but God is saying as He said to Saul, 'But ye have rejected the word of the Lord'.

Well we must move on, this time to the New Testament, and we see first of all our blessed Saviour. We see very clearly from the New Testament that we discover that the reason that the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth at all was for obedience. You've heard Him say it, I'm sure: 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God', and how many times did He confess to men on this earth: 'I seek not my own will, but the will of Him who sent me'. Read the teachings of the Lord Jesus, and obedience was what He required. In the Sermon on the Mount He said: 'Many will say on that day 'Lord, Lord'', but they will not get in, but He concludes that matter by saying 'but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, he will inherit the kingdom'. In His farewell discourse he revealed at the very end of His ministry that obedience was a condition of constant fellowship with the triune Godhead.

Let me show you this, turn with me to John 14 verse 15 - what a verse! *'If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever'* - verse 21 - *'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him'*. Verse 23: *'Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him'*.

Can I be absolutely clear? If you want to know the reality of God's presence and moving in your life, you need to be obedient. God's word is absolute and categorical. God's not answering your prayers? God is not giving you what you want? God is not changing your circumstances the way you feel they need to be? Maybe you're out of God's will in those matters, but maybe you're not, maybe those things are genuine - could it be that you're not obeying God in some way? If you want communion and want to know God, chapter 15 of John tells us very clearly, if you want to abide in the vine, how do you do it? Is it more prayer that will cause you to abide in the vine? Is it having more faith, and trying to believe for more? Is it studying more of God's word and knowing more facts about

whole of redemption of Jesus Christ that we enjoy today consists in restoring obedience to its rightful place in all of our lives and in the whole of the universe. It is always, has always been, and always will be God's chief desire to have man obedient to Him.

Now, let me give you a couple of examples from the Old Testament and the New of this. We'll look at the life of Noah. Now, if Adam was the father of the race, then the race was wiped out in the flood and God, as it were, made a new father of the race in the person of Noah. Four times in Genesis 7 verses 5, 9 and 16 we read these words or something like them, that Noah 'did according to all that God commanded Noah, so did he' - all that God commanded, Noah did. Now, you know the story and little chorus: 'Only eight were saved' - but what I want you to see is that it was Noah's obedience that led to Him saving other men, and being a positive influence in the lives of other men.

We move from Noah to Abraham, and if Noah was the father of a new race, Abraham is the father of the chosen race. In Hebrews 11, that great chapter on faith, not to exclude faith, in verse 8 we read: *'By faith Abraham obeyed'*. Obedience and faith do not cancel one another out, and you will know - if you're familiar with the book of Genesis - that the crowning act of Abraham's obedience was when he bound his son to the altar, and lifted up that knife at the orders of God upon him, and was ready to plunge it into his breast - and God was well pleased with him because of his absolute unquestioning obedience.

Let's look at that passage for a moment to remind ourselves, Genesis 22 verse 12: *'And he said'*, as he lifted up his hand with the dagger in it, *'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me'* - verse 18 - *'And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'* - now mark this statement - *'because thou hast obeyed my voice'*. Through Abraham's obedience by faith, the rest of the nation and the rest of the nations of the world would be blessed. Oh that we would realise this, right at the very beginning of the Bible, before Christ died or rose again, or the church was ever born, obedience is God's way to bless Himself and His name, and to bless the nations of the world all around us. A will utterly given up to God's will!

Now before we look at any more Scriptures, can I ask you, and I ask you from the depths of my heart: is your will completely and utterly surrendered to God's will? That was God's desire the day He saved you. Moses, when he went up Mount

Sinai, was given the message of God to the people, God said in Exodus 19:5: *'If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people'*. Moses so often obeyed the voice of the Lord, and when it came to the erection of the tabernacle - that tent of worship in the wilderness - in the last three chapters of the book of Exodus, nineteen times you find this expression, I quote: 'according to all the Lord commanded Moses, so did he'. Then after that, and this is a telling statement, from that came the natural chain reaction that we read: 'the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle' - it filled it because Moses was obedient.

Now words cannot be plainer: God is telling us right in this Old Testament period that He dwells in the midst of His people's obedience, and it is still the same today. If you want to know God's presence in your home, if you want to know God's presence in your church, if you want to know God's presence in your business, you obey God! He crowns obedience with His presence.

Now let me take you on a bit further - after 40 years wandering, in disobedience it would have to be said, the Israelites again came to a new beginning. They were facing the promised land, they were about to enter Canaan - if you were to turn to the book of Deuteronomy, you don't need to look at verses now, but if you were to read at your leisure the book of Deuteronomy, that is a book that is written in sight of the promised land by Moses. There is no other book in the whole of the word of God that uses the word 'obey' so frequently, and outlines the blessings that obedience will incur upon us. It can all be summed up in that familiar statement in Deuteronomy 11:27, where God said through Moses: *'I will set before you a blessing if you obey, and a curse if you will not obey'*.

Now I know we're still in the Old Testament, but you know this is the principle that goes right through to the New Testament, even in grace and even in Christ, that if you want to be blessed of God you need to start obeying God! If you want to be cursed of God, even as a believer; if you want to undergo God's discipline, God's displeasure, just you live in disobedience and rebellion to Him. That's why we need to beware of praying only for God's blessing, you hear people in the prayer meeting: 'Lord, bless me, Lord bless this church', when what God's word is telling us even way back in the Old Testament is: if you look after obedience, God will look after your blessing!

Have we learnt that in our early Christian lives, or even in our state of supposed Christian maturity? The next new beginning in the Old Testament is the

appointment of a King - remember the people wanted it? The first King that God chose was Saul, and there's a most solemn warning in the story of Saul that we read from in our opening text; because the story of Saul, if it tells us nothing else, is this: that God requires exact and entire obedience of all His children. In 1 Samuel 10, Samuel commanded Saul that he was to wait seven days until he, the prophet Samuel, came to him; and Samuel would perform a sacrifice, and Samuel would tell Saul from the mouth of the Lord what he ought to do. Now Samuel, as far as Saul was concerned, didn't turn up in time; and when he delayed, Saul decided: 'Well, I'm the King, I might as well sacrifice - if I can't sacrifice, who else can?'. So Saul sacrificed, and when Samuel returned we read in 1 Samuel 13:13: *'thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God'*, Samuel said to Saul, *'which he commanded thee, therefore thy kingdom shall not continue, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee'*.

What does that tell us? It tells us simply that God will not honour a man or a woman who is not obedient to Him. The second test of what was in Saul's heart was that he was commanded of God and the prophet to execute God's judgment against the nation of Amalek. So he obeys, there's no doubt about that, he obeys God and he gathers a great army together, about 200,000 or so men, he destroys Amalek after going into the wilderness to chase them - but what you need to see is that God told Saul very clearly, listen to His words: utterly to destroy all, and not to spare. You know the story: he obeyed God, yet he in his human wisdom decided as Saul the King that he would spare the best of the cattle, that he might as well spare King Agag, and he would take the cattle and he would do something very religious and very commendable with it - he would sacrifice them unto the living God. Yet God speaks to Samuel, and Samuel speaks to Saul and says: *'It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he hath not performed my commandments'*.

When Samuel comes to Saul twice, Saul retorts and protests to him: 'But I have performed the commandment of the Lord, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord!' - and so he had, we might as well think, but he hadn't obeyed it completely! His obedience had only been partial, his obedience had not been entire and absolute. God had said 'Utterly destroy all, spare not'. To sum it all up, we read the words at the beginning in 1 Samuel 15, God said *'to obey is better than sacrifice...Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, the LORD hath rejected thee'*. Now if ever there was an ancient picture of modern day believer's obedience, it is that one - it is partial. You're here today, you read your Bible, you take the odd opportunity to