

732 What Is Obedience?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

One of the best days in anyone's life is when he decides to obey the gospel and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. The day of obedience is the day of salvation; it's a day of joy. Today we're going to look into what it means to obey. On his 16th birthday, the son approached his father and said, "Dad, I'm sixteen now. When I get my license, can I drive the family car?" His father looked at him and said, "Son driving the car takes maturity, and first, you must prove you are responsible enough. And one way you must do that is to bring up your grades to an acceptable level. Second, you must read your Bible every day. And finally, I want you to get that hair cut; it looks outrageous." The son began the task of fulfilling his father's requirements, knowing that the last one might be impossible. When his grades came out, he came to his dad with a big smile. "Look, Dad, all A's and B's on my report card. Now can I drive the family car?" "Very good, son. You are one-third the way there, but have you been reading your Bible?" "Yes, dad, every day." "Very good, son. You are two-thirds of the way there. Now when are you going to cut your hair? The son, thinking he could outsmart his dad, responded, "Well, I don't see why I should get my hair cut to drive the car. Jesus had long hair, didn't he?" The father looked at his boy and said, "That's right, son, Jesus did have long hair... And Jesus walked everywhere he went."

Hebrews 5:8-9 says that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to those that obey Him. That means that Jesus saves those who obey Him. I don't know of any promise of God made to those who will not obey the Lord. Obedience is important and is worth our taking some time to study. Obeying, submitting to authority, is something we have to learn in life. Let's face it, no one likes being told what to do. Some people obey but never submit. They do what they have to do, but they don't submit their wills to the will of another.

Jesus is the perfect example of obedience to his father. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus went through a critical period contemplating his coming death on the cross. Jesus did not want to endure the pain of crucifixion. Who would? Jesus prayed for three hours that night. We don't know all that he said; but in Luke 22:42 Jesus prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Jesus wanted the Father to remove this terrible punishment of crucifixion; but that was not all He prayed. He prayed for the Father's will to be done, not His own will. He wanted the Father's will to be done even more than He wanted to be saved from the nails of the cross. No one ever loved so much.

Paul wrote to the Philippians about this sacrifice. He said in Philippians 2:3-11, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus obeyed physically but also with his heart and will. He was willing to empty himself out, to make himself nothing, so that he could accomplish what was best for others. He willfully took on the role of a servant and obeyed. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. You or I might humble our selves to die by lethal injection or by a quick and easy death. That would be

hard enough. He humbled himself by dying a slow and very painful death—the death of a cross. They nailed his hands and feet to a wooden cross and left him there to die. The pressure put upon his heart and lungs caused him to die an agonizing death. Jesus knew what suffering came with the cross. He obeyed out of love for the Father and out of love for you and me.

Peter said in 1 Peter 2:21-25, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

I can only imagine what it must have been like to hang upon a cross. That had to have been horrible. In addition to all the physical pain, there were Jewish leaders and soldiers mocking and hurling insults at him. "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." But Jesus did not call for angels to destroy the disbelievers. He didn't strike out with them with ugly words or deeds. He did not threaten them. What did Jesus say, when they crucified him? He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The heart of Jesus, in desiring to save lost humanity was so in line with the will of the Father, that he could pray for those who were putting nails through his hands and feet. What amazing love!

God wants that kind of obedience from us as well. The kind that acts from the heart according to His will. He wants us to obey on the inside and out. Our hearts and minds are going to follow someone or some thing. Paul said in Romans 6:16-18, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." By obeying God from the heart, we can be freed from sin and become the slaves of righteousness. We can follow in the steps of Jesus.

Obedience has so much to do with mindset and attitude. Many people are like the little boy told to sit down. He muttered under his breath, "I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside." You won't keep on following the Lord if your heart is not in it. Paul said in Romans 8:5-8, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." I've known folks who came to church but had no desire at all to follow God. They are only fooling themselves to think they are obedient servants of Christ.

Obedience means that my heart and soul belong to the will of God more than it belongs to me or to my desires. I am going to give me up, make myself nothing, in order to do His will. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "*we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." We are making Christ the Lord of our lives and letting Him rule in our lives. Peter urged Christians to do just that in

1 Peter 3:15: “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” When Christ is set apart as Lord, He will rule my life.

Obedience is not merely *giving up the evil*; it is also *embracing the good*. It is a transformation of my thinking and behavior. I begin to hate, yes hate, what is bad and love what is good. There is a negative part that gives up evil, and a positive part that takes up the good. Paul demonstrates this more than once in Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4:28 says, “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.” Christians give up stealing so they can earn money by working. They take the money they earned and help the needy. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” Instead of using ugly words, a Christian says things that will bless others.

The death of Jesus and his forgiveness ought to mean something to a Christian. He will begin to think like the Lord in the way he deals with other people. Paul said in Ephesians 4:31-32, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Because we have been forgiven, we learn how to forgive those who sin against us. We learn patience, kindness, and how to be tender-hearted. Instead of striking out at others, we learn to love them anyway. This is not always easy, because not everyone is going to follow the Lord and do right. We live in an ungodly, rebellious world.

The book of Numbers tells of the time a group of Levites, sons of Kohath, rebelled against Moses, Aaron, and especially against God. Korah, along with Dathan, Abiram, and 250 leaders rose up against Moses and Aaron. Numbers 16:5 says: They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” Korah and his friends decided they were as good as Moses and did not want to follow or obey Moses or God anymore. Korah was a Levite, the priestly tribe; but even that did not give him the right to set Moses aside. Moses made it clear to Israel that “the LORD has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing.” (16:28). That very day Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their families were swallowed up by the ground in their tents. The 250 leaders who rebelled with them also perished. Rebellion is when God’s authority is challenged and defied. God will never permit that.

John the Baptist said in John 3:36, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Disobedience to God has a high price. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, “the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” It matters whether or not we obey the Lord Jesus. I hear some people say that we are saved only by faith, that what we do doesn’t matter. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Whether we act or not, my friend, really does matter.

You will never find in life, my friend, a close relationship with God, until you have given yourself completely to God. You must belong to God and be willing to obey Him in everything. Many Christians play the hypocrite. They fool others sometimes, themselves sometimes, but never do they fool God. Their relationship with God is only pretended. You can’t live like the world and find peace with God. Jesus said in Luke 9:23-24, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” That really is what obedience is all about: denying ourselves, taking up a cross daily, and following Jesus. We must be willing to do as He teaches, go where He sends us, and do His will. If you try to live life your way, pleasing yourself, you will end up losing it; but if you lose yourself in the will of God, you’ll end up finding true life. I pray you will give yourself to the Lord.

Peter said in 2 Peter 2:4-10, “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.” God knows how to bless those who take refuge in Him and knows how to punish those who rebel against Him. My friend, don’t ever imagine that you can live your life in rebellion to God and still escape the wrath of God. That is perhaps the biggest lie the devil has ever told. Why not, out of love for Jesus, give your life to God and serve Him? Jesus obeyed the Father and paid the price for our sins by dying on the cross for us (2 Cor 5:21). We accept His offer of forgiveness by believing in Him, by turning from the wrong direction to follow Him in repentance, by confessing Him before men, and by being baptized (immersed in water) in His name for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). I’ve known some people, when I told them this, wanted to try to find a way out. They refused to repent, or they felt baptism wasn’t necessary to be saved. But you see that is not obedience. That’s like the boy who didn’t want cut his hair. He wanted to drive the family car on his own terms. His father wisely wouldn’t let him. My friend, you can’t go to heaven on your own terms. Only God can set the terms of your salvation. Why not rather accept His terms and be saved? Why not obey Him today and decide to live for Jesus every day for the rest of your life? You’ll be glad you did. You’ll never regret doing God’s will, because that’s the path to everlasting life.

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