

God's Word and Obedience

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This article appears in *Profiting From The Word*, © Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle Pa 17013

All professing Christians are agreed, in theory at least, that it is the bounden duty of those who bear His name to honour and glorify Christ in this world. But as to how this is to be done, as to what He requires from us to this end, there is wide difference of opinion. Few indeed realize that Christ is honoured only as we live wholly unto Him, and that, by walking in subjection to His revealed will. Few indeed really believe that word, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (I Sam. 15:22).

We are not Christians at all unless we have fully surrendered to and "received Christ Jesus *the Lord*" (Col. 2:6). We would plead with you to ponder that statement diligently. Satan is deceiving many today by leading them to suppose that they are savingly trusting in "the finished work" of Christ while their hearts remain unchanged and self still rules their lives. Listen to God's Word: "Salvation is far from the wicked; *for they seek not thy statutes*" (Psa. 119:155). Do you really *seek* His statutes? Do you diligently search His Word to discover what He has commanded? "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 2:4). What could be plainer than that?

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Obedience to the Lord in life, not merely glowing words from the lips, is what Christ requires. What a searching and solemn word is that in James 1:22: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves!" There are many *hearers* of the Word, regular hearers, reverent hearers, interested hearers; but alas, what they hear is not *incorporated* into the life: it does not regulate their way. And *God* says that they who are not *doers* of the Word are deceiving their own selves!

Alas, how many such there are in Christendom today! They are not downright hypocrites, but deluded. They suppose that because they are so dear upon salvation by grace alone they are saved. They suppose that because they sit under the ministry of a man who has *made the Bible a new book* to them they have grown in grace. They suppose that because their store of biblical knowledge has increased they are more spiritual. They suppose that the mere listening to a servant of God or reading his writings is *feeding* on the Word. Not so! We feed on the Word only when we personally appropriate, masticate *and assimilate into our lives* what we hear or read. Where there is not an increasing conformity of heart and life to God's Word, then increased knowledge will only bring increased condemnation. "And that servant, which *knew* his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither *did* according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47).

God has given us His Word not only with the design of instructing us, but for the purpose of *directing* us: to make known what He requires us to *do*. The first thing we need is a clear and distinct *knowledge* of our duty; and the first thing God demands of us is a conscientious *practice* of it, corresponding to our knowledge. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. 12:13). The Lord Jesus affirmed the same thing when He said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).

1. A man profits from the Word as he discovers God's demands upon him. It is a great and grievous mistake to suppose that in this present dispensation God has *lowered* His demands, for that would necessarily imply that His previous demand was a harsh and unrighteous one. Not so! "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). The sum of God's demands is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5).

2. A man profits from the Word when he discovers how entirety and how sinfully he has failed to meet God's demands. And let us point out for the benefit of any who may take issue with the last paragraph that no man can see what a sinner he is, how infinitely short he has fallen of measuring up to God's standard, until — he has a clear sight of the exalted demands of God upon him! Just in proportion as preachers *lower* God's standard of what He requires from every human being, to that extent will their hearers obtain an inadequate and faulty conception of their sinfulness, and the less will they perceive their need of an almighty Saviour. But once a soul really perceives what God's demands are upon him, and how completely and constantly he has failed to render Him His due, then does he recognize what a desperate situation he is in.

3. A man profits from the Word when he is taught therefrom that God, in His infinite grace, has fully provided for His people's meeting His own demands. The Lord Jesus has not only vicariously satisfied for His people the requirements of God's righteousness, but He has also secured that *they shall personally satisfy them too*.

Christ has procured the Holy Spirit to make good in them what the Redeemer wrought for them.

The grand and glorious miracle of salvation is that *the saved are regenerated*. A transforming work is wrought within them. Their understandings are illuminated, their hearts are changed, their wills are renewed. They are made “new creatures in Christ Jesus” (2 Cor. 5:17). God refers to this miracle of grace thus: “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). The heart is now inclined to God’s law: a disposition has been communicated to it which *answers* to its demands; there is a sincere desire to perform it.

Christ not only rendered a perfect obedience unto the Law for the justification of His believing people, but He also merited for them those supplies of His Spirit which were essential unto their sanctification, and which alone could transform carnal creatures and enable them to render acceptable obedience unto God. Though Christ died for the “ungodly” (Rom. 5:6), though He finds them ungodly when He justifies them, (Rom. 4:5) yet He does not leave them in that abominable state. On the contrary, He effectually teaches them by His Spirit to *deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12).

The Lord Jesus said, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:2 1). Never in the Old Testament, the Gospels or the Epistles does God own anyone as a lover of Him except the one who *keeps His commandments*. Love is something more than sentiment or emotion; it is a principle of action, and it expresses itself in something more than honeyed expressions, namely, by deeds which please the object loved. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). Oh, my reader, you are deceiving yourself if you think you love God and yet have no deep desire and make no real effort to walk obediently before Him.

But what is obedience to God? It is far more than a mechanical performance of certain duties. I may have been brought up by Christian parents, and under them acquired certain moral habits, and yet my abstaining from taking the Lord’s name in vain, and being guiltless of stealing, may be no obedience to the third and eighth commandments. Again, obedience to God is far more than conforming to the conduct of His people. I may board in a home where the Sabbath is strictly observed, and out of respect for them, or because I think it is a good and wise course to rest one day in seven, I may refrain from all unnecessary labour on that day, and yet not keep the fourth commandment at all! Obedience is not only subjection to an external law, *but it is the surrendering of my will to the authority of another*. Thus, obedience to God is the heart’s recognition of His lordship: of His right to command, and my duty to comply. It is the complete subjection of the soul to the blessed yoke of Christ.

4. We profit from the Word when we not only see it is our bounden duty to obey God, but when there is wrought in us a love for His commandments. The *blessed* man is the one whose “*delight* is in the law of the Lord” (Psa. 1:2). And again we read, “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments” (Psa. 112:1). It affords a real test for our hearts to face honestly the questions, Do I

really value His *commandments* as much as I do His promises? Ought I not to do so? Assuredly, for the one proceeds as truly from *His* love as does the other. The heart's compliance with the voice of Christ is the foundation for all practical holiness.

Any man who supposes that he is saved and yet has no genuine love for God's commandment is deceiving himself. The Psalmist said, "Oh how love I thy law!" (Psa. 119:97). And again, "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psa. 119:127). Should someone object that *that* was under the Old Testament, we ask, Do you intimate that the Holy Spirit produces a lesser change in the hearts of those whom He now regenerates than He did of old? But a New Testament saint also placed on record, "I *delight* in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). And, my reader, unless *your* heart *delights* in the law of God there is something radically wrong with you; yea, it is greatly to be feared that you are spiritually dead.

5. A man profits from the Word when his heart and will are yielded to all God's commandments. Partial obedience is no obedience at all. A holy mind declines whatsoever God forbids, and chooses to practice all He requires, without any exception. If our minds submit not unto God in all His commandments, we submit not to His authority in anything He enjoins. If we do not approve of our duty in its *full* extent, we are greatly mistaken if we imagine that we have any *liking* unto *any* part of it. A person who has no principle of holiness in him may yet be disinclined to many vices and be pleased to practice many virtues, as he perceives the former are unfit actions and the latter are, in themselves, comely actions, but his disapprobation of vice and approbation of virtue do not arise from any disposition to *submit to the will of God*.

True spiritual obedience is *impartial*. A renewed heart does not pick and choose from God's commandments: the man who does so is not performing God's will, *but his own*. Make no mistake upon this point; if we do not sincerely desire to please God in *all* things, then we do not truly wish to do so in anything. Self must be denied; not merely some of the things which may be craved, but self itself! A wilful allowance of *any* known sin breaks the whole law (James 2:10, 11). "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments" (Psa. 119:6). The Lord Jesus said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do *whatsoever* I command you" (John 15:14): if I am not His friend, then I must be His *enemy*, for there is no other alternative — see Luke 19:27.

6. We profit from the Word when the soul is moved to pray earnestly for enabling grace. In regeneration the Holy Spirit communicates a nature which is fitted for obedience according to the Word. The heart has been won by God. There is now a deep and sincere desire to please Him. But the new nature possesses no inherent power, and the old nature or "flesh" strives against it, and the Devil opposes. Thus, the Christian exclaims, "To will is present with me; but how to *perform* that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18). This does not mean that he is the slave of sin, as he was before conversion; but it means that he finds not how to *fully* realize his spiritual aspirations. Therefore does he pray, "*Make me to go* in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Psa. 119:35). And again, "Order my steps in Thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (Psa. 119:133).

“Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble” (Psa. 10:17). The “desires” of the saint are the language of his soul, and the promise is, “He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him” (Psa. 145:19). The Christian’s desire is to obey God in all things, to be completely conformed to the image of Christ. But this will only be realized in the resurrection. Meanwhile, God for Christ’s sake graciously accepts the wilt for the deed (I Pet. 2:5). He knows our hearts and sees in His child a genuine love for and a sincere desire to keep all His commandments, and He accepts the fervent longing and cordial endeavour in lieu of an exact performance (2 Cor. 8:12). But let none who are living in wilful disobedience draw false peace and pervert to their own destruction what has just been said for the comfort of those who *are* heartily desirous of seeking to please God in all the details of their lives.

7. We profit from the Word when we are, even now, enjoying the reward of obedience. “Godliness is profitable unto all things” (I Tim. 4:8). By obedience we purify our souls (I Pet. 1:21). By obedience, we obtain the ear of God (I John 3:22), just as disobedience is a barrier to our prayers (Isa. 59:2; Jer. 5:25). By obedience, we obtain precious and intimate manifestations of Christ unto the soul (John 14:21). As we tread the path of wisdom (complete subjection to God) we discover that “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prov. 3:17). “His commandments are *not* grievous” (I John 5:3), and “in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa. 19:11).

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