

## Obedience

### Evidence of Belief

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church he asked the people in the church to examine themselves to make sure that the Holy Spirit was within them for if they found that He was not, they were disqualified from being a true member of the body of Christ. The Corinthians were seeking proof from Paul that Christ was speaking through him and Paul tells them that if their faith is true then that would be the proof they sought because it was by his message that they believed and were being instructed.

*2Corinthians13vs5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified.*

This call for self-examination of a person's spiritual state is one that all of us should regularly give heed to. A person is justified (satisfy God's requirement for justice) by the free gift of having our sins wiped away by believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through this belief, the person is seen by God as being righteous (in right standing with God). Yet we have also seen that the belief to receive this gift of God must be far more than just words spoken or thoughts in our mind. Our belief must be sourced from our heart where there is a recognition of what sin is and a commitment to turn from it and follow Christ Jesus. The difference between someone just believing with their mind and the one who believes in their heart is obedience. Each of us is assured of our eternal life through our belief which is evidenced in our daily life of obedience to God. The German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, states in one of his widely read books that:

*faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.<sup>21</sup>*

When the angel Gabriel told Zacharias of the son he was about to have, John the Baptist, he said that John would be the forerunner for Jesus Christ and that he would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (the hearts of the Jews to the Gentiles) and also turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just (righteous).

*Luke1vs16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ` to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, ' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. "*

John the Baptist started the work of opening the way up for the salvation that was about to come through Jesus Christ for the Gentiles. A salvation that would come through Jesus, a Jew, and then one that would be taught and spread by the Jews. John condemned the hypocritical lives that were lived by the Jewish religious leaders as well as many others who came to him to receive the water baptism. He spoke of the importance of repentance that meant a change in thinking and a turning away from the disobedient lives that people were living.

The word "wisdom", as used in the verse quoted, has been interpreted from a Greek word that means to have practical wisdom. In this way his message to people was to prepare themselves for Jesus Christ by turning away from living in disobedience to God and living a life that reflected the practical wisdom that came to people who were in right standing with God. This practical wisdom came from knowing the will of God and applying it to their daily life. It was a daily attitude of obedience to God.

In the verse quoted below Jesus made it clear that there would be some people who considered Him to be Lord of their life but who shall be surprised when they are not accepted into the kingdom of heaven because they did not do the will of God. These individuals may even have done great tasks in the name of God but Jesus warns His listeners that people who do not do His Father's will in their life will be cast away. The true test of our faith in Jesus Christ is our commitment to turning our life around and choosing to apply our will to being obedient to God's will rather than just following our own.

*Matthew 7:21 " Not everyone who says to Me, ` Lord, Lord, ' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ` Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? ' 23 And then I will declare to them, ` I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness! ' "*

It is important to understand that all of us choose who will be our spiritual father. We are born sinners and in this state our spiritual father is Satan and we live under his spiritual rule and captivity. Under the rule, spiritual fatherhood and influence of Satan, people are influenced to pursue the desires of his heart rather than those of God. In speaking to some Jews, Jesus told them of the spiritual freedom that would come as they believed in Him. However, without Him, He tells them that they are spiritual captives and that they do the deeds and fulfill the desires of their spiritual father, Satan (John 8:31-45).

*John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. ...*

If God is truly our spiritual Father we will find that we obtain new desires which are in accordance with His will. Jesus made it very clear that each of us is only accepted into His spiritual family if we follow the desires of God by obeying the will of God in our life.

*Mark 3:35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.*

As we daily commit to a close relationship with God, we are able to receive all His promises, instruction and blessings. God's desire is to be in full possession of a person's heart and He achieves this through the daily work of the Holy Spirit as we surrender to Him and diligently follow the spiritual disciplines. Our total obedience follows with the increasing transformation of our heart. He wants to restore us to what we were designed to be. We were created to be in God's likeness and it is only by the work of the Holy Spirit that we are transformed into that likeness and move ever more

towards being what we were created to be.

As parents, it is essential for us to teach our children respect and obedience towards us (Ephesians6vs1, Colossians3vs20). When children learn to be respectful and obedient to us as their earthly parents, they will find it easier to understand the importance of being respectful and obedient to their heavenly Father, not only as children but also when they grow up. In the same way that we expect our children to not argue with us and make excuses for not being obedient to us, so also as adults we must do the same for our heavenly Father. He requires our obedience to His word without excuses or reasons why we can't be obedient.

Each of us must reflect on our own life and allow God to show us the state of our heart and spiritual life. This must be done with the knowledge that it is possible for us to have a head knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but that knowledge may have never turned into a heart-held faith. No other person can look at our life and speak for it, we alone are accountable to God. We will not be able to refer to our pastor, priest or some other person we know to attest to our good character or faith. On the day of judgment, we will have to stand on our own to be judged by God.

In the same chapter of the gospel of John where we read that those who believe in Christ Jesus have eternal life (John3vs16) we also read that if we do not obey the Son we shall not see life.

*John3vs36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." <sup>22</sup>*

The New King James translation and others include the words "... he that believeth not ..." rather than "... he who does not obey ...". However, the Greek word used for "believes not" is different to the one translated as "believes" used at the start of this verse. A more literal translation of it is "he who does not obey" as reflected in the New American Standard translation. The word used is translated in other areas as disobey, such as Romans2vs8, 1 Peter2vs7-8 and 3vs20.

When we continue in disobedience after claiming we believe, we demonstrate that the belief is not sourced from our heart for it has had no impact on how we live our life. It is impossible for a person to consistently act in a way that is contradictory to the belief that they hold in their heart. Anyone who calls themselves a Christian but is able to continue deliberately sinning with no remorse or repentance may find that Jesus will tell them that He does not know them as His followers or as having been under His blood covering. True repentance comes to our life by the Holy Spirit convicting us of our sins and us then changing our daily life so that we no longer commit those sins. When we do sin there should be a heart-held grief that causes us to repent of the sin and try to change our life so that we can be free of the sin in the future.

When we love God, our relationship with Him makes us want to please and obey Him. As we daily obey, we are increasingly perfected in our spiritual life. Obedience to His commands (law) produces love for Him while disobedience causes us to withdraw from Him. Jesus says that anyone who knows God will keep His commandments and anyone who says he knows God and does not keep the

commandments is a liar. We show our love for God by living our life in a way that is pleasing to Him, through our obedience to His instructions for our life.

*1John2vs3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, " I know Him, " and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

In writing to the Roman Christians, Paul warns those people who think that they are reconciled to God but still have a hard and impenitent heart which shows in their life through their disobedience to God. He warns these Christians that they will be judged for their deeds and not receive eternal life.

*Romans2vs 5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who " will render to each one according to his deeds ": 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.*

James, the brother of Jesus and the person appointed to head up the most significant group of Christians in that day, the group in Jerusalem which included Peter, states that people's obedience to Christ's teaching (works) demonstrates their faith in Christ (James2vs14-26). God requires us to surrender to Him so that He can then do His work in and through us.

*James2vs17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, " You have faith, and I have works. " Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

James is not saying that we are justified (satisfy God's requirement for justice) by our obedience to God but what he is saying is that how we live our daily life provides evidence of what we believe in our heart, our faith. He shows us that Abraham's faith was reflected in him offering his only son Isaac to God as a sacrifice. Similarly, Rahab believed in God and that He was with the Israelites and therefore turned against her own people to help them. These are examples of how great actions in the lives of people demonstrated what they held in their heart and the faith they possessed.

When we lay claim to the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection but are not willing to pay the price of living a new life surrendered to God, we do not respond to God's favor in the way that He requires us to. It was in relation to these people that Dietrich Bonhoeffer made his well known statement.

*The justification of the sinner in the world degenerated into the justification of sin and the world. Costly grace was turned into cheap grace without discipleship.* <sup>23</sup>

We need to be careful that we do not live under a delusion of being in a good relationship with God when we are actually far from it. Although we may have at one time genuinely believed and received the Holy Spirit within us, a sinful life that is deliberately and carelessly lived, can result in our spiritual life growing cold and our heart being hardened. As the writer in Hebrews states, we must be careful that we are not amongst those that draw back to destruction (Hebrews10vs39 and Hebrews3vs12-14) but ensure that our faith remains so that we can receive our eternal reward. We also read in Hebrews that Jesus is the source of salvation for all those who obey Him.

*Hebrews5vs9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,*

If we choose to not obey or slide back from a position of obedience to disobedience we choose to distance ourselves from all that God has for our life. Paul warned Christians to be careful because they could fall from the reconciled position they have with God.

*1Corinthians10vs 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*

God has always demanded obedience from all who are in a relationship with Him. When the first people were created, His one demand upon them was to obey Him by not partaking from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their failure to be obedient caused their separation from God and the separation of people from God in the generations that followed. At each significant point in God's relationship with people we again see the importance that obedience plays.

- Through the obedience of Noah, he and his family are saved when all else perish around him.
- When Abraham is obedient, God says that because of his obedience all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in his seed.
- Under the Old Covenant God made with the nation of Israel through Moses, God gives them His law so that they would be obedient to it.
- The New Covenant was put into place by the obedience of Jesus Christ going to the cross and shedding His precious blood.

Through the obedience of Jesus Christ He provided the way for people to be reconciled to God and to be restored to what they were created to be. We were individually created to be obedient to God. We were separated from God through not being obedient and with reconciliation to Him, He expects us to be obedient. We are individually told to lay down our old lives of being disobedient to God and take up a new life of being obedient to Him.

In the first letter of Peter to Jewish Christians scattered in many areas He says that they were chosen by God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit so that they would be obedient to Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood (1Peter1vs2). In the second chapter, Peter tells us that we are called by God for the purpose of following in the steps of Jesus Christ (1Peter2vs21).

In the final book of the Bible, Revelation, Jesus speaks of those who are obedient to

the commandments of God as being blessed and able to gain access to the tree of life.

*Revelation 22 vs 12 " And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. " 14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city."*

We cannot force ourselves to be obedient to God's will for this can never be sustained on a daily basis for any reasonable period of time. This form of obedience is neither satisfying to people nor God. As we learned at the start of this book, God gave us free choice so that there could be a satisfying relationship between us and Him. The obedience that God seeks comes from a close and loving relationship with Him. It can only come into our life by a specific commitment to God to come to know Him, understand His will, draw near to Him and be obedient to His will. In a close and loving relationship with God, the Holy Spirit within us not only instructs us in God's will but also empowers us to live in obedience to it. As the likeness of Jesus is revealed in our life through this close relationship, obedience flows naturally from our maturing spiritual life.

As believers, God wants us to now live for Him and unless we position ourselves to obey Him we will find it difficult, if not impossible, to come to know His will in a deep and meaningful way. We are to no longer waste our time but we are called to redeem the time ensuring that we build ourselves up spiritually. We are called to live our life focused on knowing and obeying the will of God.

*1 Peter 4 vs 1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*

**21. Bonhoeffer, D. 2003, The Cost of Discipleship, SCM Press, London.**

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**23. Bonhoeffer, D. 2003, The Cost of Discipleship, SCM Press, London.**

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