

Obeying The Gospel

by I. C. Herendeen

“Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22)

According to the Word of God, to “obey” means to give our earnest attention to the Word, to submit to its authority, and to carry out its instructions in our daily life. But how very few professing Christians make any serious effort to do this. “It is easy to persuade ourselves we really desire that our daily lives should be well-pleasing to God, but what evidence can we produce that such a desire is genuine? That which is well-pleasing unto God is made known in His statutes, and it is only as we meditate on them and seek to understand them that our consciences will be impressed by them and our wills moved to do them.” The Word of God is given to us to be obeyed. This is part of the honor we owe to God. It is not enough to hear God’s voice, but we must obey. “Ye shall do my judgments, and keep my ordinances” (Lev. 18:4). And this obedience is to be rendered freely and cheerfully, devoutly and fervently to be acceptable to God.

In 2 Peter 1:12 we read about being “established in the present truth.” As times and conditions change certain truths need to be emphasized and dwelt upon more than others. There was a time when the blessed truth of the eternal security of the believer needed to be stressed, but today special emphasis needs to be put upon the perseverance of the saints instead, in order to preserve the balance of truth; for the pendulum has now swung to the opposite side. This balance needs to be restored. Obedience to the Word of God must be stressed sufficiently to make it effective in the lives of professing Christians instead of being soft-pedaled or neglected altogether. Perhaps in an effort to avoid the error of salvation by works we have fallen into the opposite error and falsehood of salvation without works. “The Bible knows nothing of salvation without obedience. It recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor any obedience that does not spring from faith.”

Paul tells us in Romans 1:5 that he was sent to preach “obedience to the faith among all nations.” He reminded the Christians in Rome that they had been set free from sin because they had “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered them” (Rom. 6:17). According to the New Testament there is no contradiction between faith and obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience apart from faith: the two are opposite sides of the same coin. If these are separated the one from the other both lose their value. As the hymn has it:

***Trust and obey,
For there’s no other way,
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.***

In chap. 2:14-26, James in his epistle shows us the error and uselessness of those who rest in a bare profession of faith which does not evidence itself in the doing of those "good works" (Titus 2:14) which "God hath before ordained that we should walk in" (Eph. 2:10). It needs to be forcibly brought to our attention that such a profession of the Christian faith will save no one; that it is a useless profession, yea, a profession that will bring condemnation in the Day of Judgment. *Nothing honors God so much as our obedience.* I Sam. 15:22 tells us that **"to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."** From this we learn that no offering is acceptable to God unless rendered by those whose will is subject to His.

In his epistle, James was writing to those who were building on a wretched foundation, a false foundation, and he brings forth arguments to prove that no man is justified by "faith only" without "good works." In 2:14 he shows us that "faith without works" will be of no profit to us, and cannot save us. "Of what value then is such a faith? It may gain us the good opinion of others, and it may also in some cases procure us some worldly good. But, really what profit would it be to us if we 'gained the whole world and lost our own soul?' Such a faith is no better than no faith at all, if it does not save!" "What doth it profit?... Can faith [a dead, inoperative faith] save him?" No, instead it will only aggravate our condemnation in the last day.

It is one thing to profess to have faith, but another to actually have it. They are two entirely different things. When the faith professed is genuine, it is bound to manifest itself in the life by the performing of that which God requires. "Faith worketh" and "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). Christ says, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:21). We are only "mocking" Him if we profess to love Him when we do not obey Him!

Selah (pause)! "Nowhere in Scripture does God own anyone as a lover of Him but those who keep His commandments. Love is something more than sentiment or emotion; it is a principle of action, and expresses itself by performing deeds which please the object beloved." My reader, you are only deceiving yourself if you think you love God and yet have no deep desire and make no sincere, honest, and real effort to obey Him in all things as required by the Word.

We read in Acts 5:32 that the Holy Spirit is given only to "them that obey Him." If we do not sincerely desire to please Him in all things, we do not wish to please Him in anything. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). "And that servant that knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47). "Be not deceived: God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7). God has given us His Word, not only to instruct us, but to direct us. In it He makes known what He requires of us to do and to refrain from doing if we would please Him who has "redeemed us to God by his blood" (Rev. 5:9). When a man has been truly regenerated, a transforming work has been wrought in him so that a sincere and honest desire now moves him to do

whatsoever He saith unto us. And we say with David, *"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek"* (Psa. 27:8).

"Obedience is not only subjection to external law, but it is the surrendering of my will to the authority of Another. Thus, obedience 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." "Good works" (Eph. 2:10) of themselves do not save, but neither can we be saved without them. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17).

We repeat, it is not enough to hear God's voice, we are required to obey it. And if we truly love Him we will make every effort to be obedient. God disdains our sacrifice if obedience is lacking. The purpose for which God has given us His commands is that we obey them. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments" (Lev. 18:5). A king publishes his edicts for the purpose of their being obeyed. Our obedience to be acceptable to a holy God must be rendered freely and cheerfully, and must reach to all God's commandments. It must be like the fire on the altar which was always kept burning (Lev. 6:13). If we love the Lord as we profess to do then our obedience will be constant; we will make every endeavor to imitate Christ who was "obedient unto death" (Phil 2 8)

By our profession we have vowed to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world, and to fight under Christ's banner till death. To refuse or be neglectful in obeying God is a high contempt of Him. A terrible sin indeed. It is rebellion against God; and rebellion, His Word tells us "is as the sin of witchcraft" (I Sam. 15:23).

"There is much praying today for revival, but little revival has resulted. Why? Because we have substituted prayer for obedience. We will never have God's blessing upon us individually or in Church groups until we begin in earnest to obey God's commandments. For our disobedience has blocked the channel of blessing." Is it any wonder, then, that our lives are so listless, lifeless and fruitless? How can it be otherwise, for God will not bless our ignoring His precepts. Ezekiel(33:31)had the same situation to contend with in his day; he says—"They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Isaiah (29: 13) uttered the same complaint when he wrote, "The Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me. . . their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." God complained that the Pharisees honored the Lord with their lips but their hearts were "far from" Him. How about *your* heart? Are you diligently seeking and endeavoring to the best of your ability to obey His commands and honor His precepts? Do you acknowledge and mourn over your many sins and failures to God? "An honest and good heart" will seriously endeavor to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing" (Col. 1:10), and keep His "commandments" which are not "grievous" (I John 5:3). The Psalmist said, "thy"commandments are my delight" (Psa. 119:127, 143). Can you say the

same? — I. C. Herendeen

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