

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

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Obedience

JOSHUA- OUR EXAMPLE OF OBEDIENCE

Chuck Webster

Some day perhaps sooner than we think someone will stand at the front of an auditorium and eulogize us, helping our friends and families in their grief. He will probably tell some stories about things we did and enjoyed, highlighting some of our better character traits. But consider this: if you were writing a one-sentence obituary that you wanted to be true of you after you are gone, what would it say? It could not be any better than this description of Joshua: As the Lord had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses (Joshua 11:15, NKJV). *This man did what God said.* What could be better than that?

Joshua's life consistently modeled godly obedience. Here are

two specific situations that seem to represent everything about his life.

Joshua obeyed even when in the minority (Numbers 13-14). His attitude is refreshing and encouraging. When God said something, Joshua simply took Him at His word. Before Joshua was given the reigns of leadership after Moses' death, God had told Israel to send twelve spies into Canaan to investigate it. The mission was not to see *if* the land could be taken, but *how*. God had already told the people that He would give them the land. How the story ends is well known. Joshua and Caleb refused to give in to the pressure from the other ten spies, who said the land was too strong and the people too powerful. Joshua seemed baffled by his peers' faithlessness. The Lord is with us, he said (Numbers 14:9), seemingly

implying, Isn't that all we need to know?

One of the most important lessons our generation could learn is that we should not test the winds before we decide what we believe to be true. That may work in some sense for politicians, but it has never worked for determining the will of God. In a world that is rapidly changing what it accepts in the realms of sexuality and ethics, God's word speaks clearly. In a religious climate that often demands conformity, we should be willing to embrace Joshua's willingness to step out, even when threatened by our peers (v. 10). Those following God's will have always been in the minority.

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Editorial
Christ Learned Obedience
Ronnie Hayes

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8,9). Why is it so difficult for us to grasp the concept of obedience? It is almost as if obey has become a dirty word. Once, while going through the vows at a wedding rehearsal, the bride said, “I don’t know about that love, honor, and obey”. She might not, but we can! Just as Peter stated, “...We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). The example of Christ and His obedience is very important for us. It spells out what God wants.

The writer of Hebrews wants us to know that there were no exceptions made to the rules, even though he was the **Son**. As parents we have a tendency to overlook things or to bend the rules regarding our children. Sometimes we call these children privileged. What we should learn from this is simple. If God required His Son to be obedient, He will most certainly require the same of us! Robert Milligan, in his commentary on *Hebrews* wrote, “Though he was the Son of God, he claimed no special privileges on that account; but as a loyal subject of the Divine government, he submitted willingly to all that was required of him as the Redeemer of the world” (198). No one can point to Christ and accusingly say, “Well, His Father let Him by with it.” At Christ’s baptism John states, “...I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me” (Matthew 3:14). Christ’s answer was, “...Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Christ reminded his disciples,

“...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30).

“...My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34). Again Christ emphasized the importance of obedience when He said, “...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). Some would use the fact that they are sons or daughters as an excuse. I’m thankful that Christ didn’t. Are you and I making excuses for not being obedient?

It was through **Suffering** that Christ learned obedience. Burton Coffman writes in his commentary on *Hebrews*, “His perfect obedience was the cause of bitter hatred against him and provided the occasion for every blow that fell upon his person” (110). They hated Christ because His life exposed theirs. Christ would call them out by name “saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matthew 23:2,3). Seven times in Matthew 23, Christ calls them, “Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites” (23:13,14,15,23,25,27,29). It wasn’t long after this that the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people (Matthew 26:3) “consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him” (Matthew 26:4). Christ is not suffering because He is a murderer or thief but because His goodness exposed their hypocrisy. We should feel honored when we suffer for the cause of Christ. “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth

upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:14-16).

Because of His obedience he “...became the author of eternal **Salvation** unto all them that obey him” (5:9). “What the writer to the Hebrews is saying is that all the experiences, the sufferings, through which Jesus passed perfectly fitted Him to become the Redeemer and the Savior of men. He was able to save men because He came through every dark valley of life through which the human spirit must pass” (William Barclay, 46,47). As the author of eternal salvation Christ has provided the message by which we can be saved. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). He also paid for salvation with His blood. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:8,9). We also have His promise of salvation: “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4,5).

Christ is our example of obedience. Why would anyone rebel against the will of God, knowing what God has done for us? As Peter said, “...We ought to obey God...” (Acts 5:29).

HALF-HEARTEDNESS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTABLE

Brian Gentle

One of the saddest things to see among Christians today (or so called Christians) is the lack of complete submission to God. This has always plagued man beginning with the first man and woman. God, as we will see, has always been straightforward with His will and His warnings. In our text Moses is still giving God's people some last instructions before they enter into Canaan. In the text, he is reminding them to obey God completely. Now this is not the only time he instructs them of how they are to obey God. In fact, if counted properly, five times Moses makes similar pleas in this book (Deuteronomy 6:5; 26:16; 30:2; 30:6; 30:10) and some twenty one times in the Bible. Three principles are either implied or stated in all of these verses that we too need to understand. We **MUST HEAR** what God says, we **MUST LIVE** what God says, and we **MUST TEACH** what God says...ALL of what He says. That is the message of Moses in a "nutshell". This has been preached to God's people from the beginning. In fact one could say they have heard this sermon many times before...but why?

These words and implications are echoed throughout the pages of scripture because...

(1) They set forth the **AUTHOR**. It was from God. They were not to obey anyone else nor their own desires. The text says, "*the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.*" This was a decree from God. It reveals by what authority Moses was speaking and also the authority by which Moses had led them from Egypt. Because they were God's commands, they were bound to do them. This is still true today as we read the Word of God. We are bound to live by them because it is

from God. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to pick and choose what we like best. People today do not want to know everything God has to say but only part of it. This is called half-heartedness or, in Revelation 3:15ff, lukewarmness. The Laodicean church was neither hot nor cold. In fact one could say they were indifferent...indifferent to what God says for them to do and/or be. That was the problem with Israel. They were indifferent to what God had commanded them before so Moses is reminding them.

(2) They set forth the **ALLEGIANCE**. It was to God.

Their loyalty to God would be tested by their obedience.

That was the case then and it

is now. Nothing has changed. Some want to think they can live anyway they want and still be counted in the "few" that will be entering the "narrow way." (Matthew 7:14)

There are many false teachers feeding the minds of many with this idea. However, going back to Revelation three, Jesus says that He will "*spue thee out of my mouth.*" (verse 16) Does that sound like God is ok with one being half-hearted? Lukewarm water is not good for anything. Nothing refreshes a thirst like a glass of cold water. Hot water is also good for cleaning and for our health. Again, lukewarm water is so detestable that Christ said He would vomit them out (the idea portrayed by the word "spue"). That is a disgusting picture. One must see the importance of what God expects...complete loyalty...no

Some want to think they can live anyway they want and still be counted in the "few" that will be entering the "narrow way."

division of the mind (Romans 12:2), the marriage (Romans 7:4), and the mission (Mark 16:15, 16).

(3) They set forth the **APPEAL**. It was by means of God. They were told to keep and do the statutes and judgments of God with ALL of their heart and soul. Only because of the grace and goodness of God did he allow them to enter the promise land of Canaan. Notice this though...it was conditional on the fact that they had to obey God. Not only did they have to obey but they had to with ALL of their heart and soul. God did not want just a small portion of their heart or soul. God wants us ALL or NOT at ALL. This appeal rings throughout scripture...even in the New Testament. This is again seen in Revelation three. How ignorant are we to think our hearts can be divided and still be good with God? What if one gave half his heart to his wife? Divorce will be inevitable (which is sadly proved today). Some only look at the goodness and love of God without seeing or understanding the severity of God. Paul is preaching this same thought to the church at Rome in Romans 11. He is referencing Israel as his example (which is the context of our study). The threat of being cut off is a reality (notice verse 22).

With all of this understood, Revelation three gives us some **ADVICE**. In verse 18 Jesus says to go to Him for everything we need. In verse 19 He tells them to accept His discipline. Verse 19 also gives us instruction to repent and to be earnest in our service to God. Then in verse 20 one needs to respond to Christ's invitation if the title of this article describes you.

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LOVE IS INVOLVED IN OBEDIENCE

Bobby Liddell

Millions believe that loving Jesus is necessary to salvation, but have been misled into thinking that obedience is NOT essential to forgiveness from sins and hope of eternal life with Him. We could consider what men, who are recognized as religious leaders, theological scholars, famous personalities, popular politicians, or well known and influential in other ways, might say—and we could argue the merits of a hundred different positions, opinions, and ideas of men, until the Lord returns, and still not know the truth, for the answer is not in men (Jeremiah 10:23). The eternal destiny of precious, immortal souls is in the balance; therefore, we need an answer that is clear, authoritative, and true. We need an answer upon which we can depend for fellowship with God now, and forever, and upon which we can rely as the sure way to Heaven.

If we really want to know what is NECESSARY for salvation in Christ; that is, what one MUST know, believe, and do in order to have his sins washed away (Acts 16:30), why not go to Jesus for instruction? Surely, Jesus is able to tell us if He requires anything of us, and what He requires of us, in order to know the blessings of redemption by His precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). What did the Savior say about love and obedience?

Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Notice the simplicity of the statement, with only seven words in our English translation. The original language (Koine Greek) uses eight words to show that one who *keeps on loving* Jesus *will keep* His commandments. The words of John 14:15 are familiar to us, and understandable, and the concepts conveyed by them are not necessarily

difficult, certainly not as difficult as some would make them. So, let us proceed with the optimism that we can understand what Jesus said, and that we can do what he requires of us (cf. Ephesians 5:17; 3:3-4).

Suppose one should say, “Could you please explain John 14:15?” The explanation would be this: Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Yet, someone asks, “But what does this mean?” The meaning of the Lord’s words is: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Still another might say, “Could you put these words spoken by the Son of God, so long ago, so that people today can understand?” For a more “modern” look, the quote could then be: “If *you* love me, keep my commandments.” Again, the question might come, “Could you interpret this verse for us?” The interpretation is this: Jesus said that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. Try as one may to establish such, there is no hidden, dark, obscured meaning to the words of the Lord recorded in John 14:15, and no place wherein man may correctly interject, “I know that is what it says, but that is not what Jesus meant.”

Unsatisfied, some may question which commandments does love for Jesus require us to keep? Which church laws are binding? Which creed of men is the ONE we must follow? Whose opinion is correct? What man’s way is right? Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep *my* commandments.” Keeping the commandments of a mere man, a group of men, or a religious organization of men, shows our love for men, not for Jesus. In fact, He also said, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Loving any man so much that we will obey him, instead

of the Son of God, will cost us our souls. Jesus declared, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).

Why is it so hard for men to see the need for both love and obedience? Why is it necessary to remind men that love is involved in obedience? Why do so many miss the point that if we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments? Could the answer to these questions be that someone has confused us, misled us, or lied to us (John 8:44)?

We are happy to sing, “Jesus loves me,” and, we rejoice to know: “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). How wonderfully His love worked together with His obedience to the Father’s will to make possible our eternal salvation—if we obey Him. Someone asks, “Why should we love Him?” Through Him alone (Acts 4:12), we can have redemption, that sin may no longer enslave us. The better question is, “How can we NOT love Him?” His love made possible the washing away of our sins by His precious blood (Revelation 1:5), for His love for us meant the once for all sacrifice He offered for our sins.

Yes, love is involved in obedience (John 15:9-16; 1 John 2:3-4; 5:2-3), and obedience is the real proof that we love Him. If we do not obey Him, we will not be with Him (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). How can we say we love Him, if we refuse to do what He said (cf. Luke 6:46)?

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OUR ETERNAL DESTINY DEPENDS UPON OUR OBEDIENCE

Michael Light (Revelation 22:14)

For the past several years the idea of obedience being essential to salvation has been highly offensive to many. We hear of grace only salvation; faith only salvation; yet precious little about the necessity of obedience. Some act as if the word “obey” is a dirty four-letter word. The truth is obedience has always been a part of God’s plan for man’s salvation.

Notice a couple of Old Testament examples, which will shed some light on God’s view of our obedience.

The Garden of Eden

The very first interaction we have recorded between God and man centers around obedience (or the lack thereof). In Genesis 3:3 we find that the Lord had given specific instructions to Adam and Eve concerning which trees they could eat of: “...God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” Notice that the instruction from God was clear, easily understood, and as we will note He expected them to do what He said.

The serpent entered the garden and tempted Eve by convincing her that God didn’t really mean what He had said. In fact he only changed one word of the statement God had made. He added the little word, “not.” While this is a very small change, it in effect reversed the word of God. Hence, Jesus referred to Satan as a liar “from the beginning” (John 8). Any time someone begins to down play or deny a teaching of the Bible, they too are liars and their message should be disregarded and they should be marked as false teachers (Galatians 1:6-9; Romans 16:17,18; Ephesians 5:11).

The Life of Abraham

If one word were chosen to define the life of Abraham, it would most like be “faith.” I love the message of Romans 4:18-22, which states:

Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to god; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able to perform.

The entire journey of the life of Abraham is summed up in the above passage. His faith (absolute trust and confidence in God) moved him to obey God every step of the way. God told him to leave his homeland and head south, and that is exactly what he did. Every time the Lord gave direction Abraham obeyed. For a person to read the life of this great patriarch and conclude that obedience doesn’t really matter is an indefensible position.

Noah and the Ark

This historic account just like the previous two carries the same message. When God speaks, true followers (the word, “follower” should also be a hint, we are to follow [obey] what the Lord says) listen and respond accordingly. A great passage that reinforces this truth is Genesis 6:22, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.”

God gave specific instruction concerning the dimensions and the materials for the ark’s construction. He specified how many of which animals to put on the ark. It is a blasphemous lie to teach that it really didn’t matter – that Noah could have ignored or altered certain aspects of God’s word and still been saved. Had Noah done that he would have ceased to be a righteous man (one who does right as defined by the Almighty). Due to his fidelity to God’s will his name along with Abraham’s is found

in the great chapter of the heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11).

Multiplied Others

We could literally write dozens and dozens of books examining the lives of those found both in the Old and New Testaments. And an absolute fact that is borne out again and again is this – God saves the obedient and damns the disobedient. In our day we spend far too much time trying to determine why people ignore the truth, refuse to listen and fail to follow the word of God. The fact is it does not matter why a person rejects the truth, the fact that they do is why they are lost (John 8:32; John 14:6). Unforgiven sin is what damns (Isaiah 59:1,2). Obedience of the Gospel is the only way to have those sins removed and our souls saved in the hereafter.

Jesus asked the question, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say” (Luke 6:46). In Matthew 7:21, he declares, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven.” Christ stressed obedience. We are all men of clay feet. We make mistakes and we sin. The only way we can have access to the Father is by obeying the process by which He removes our sins. We must (not optional): 1. Hear and believe the gospel (Romans 10:17); 2. repent of our past sins (Acts 17:30); 3. Confess our faith in Jesus as God’s Son (Romans 10:10); And be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). Once we’ve done this we must walk in the light (live as God instructs) as He is in the light (1 John 1:7ff). A failure to obey God will always result in a return to sin. For we do not possess the wherewithal to stay right with God (Jeremiah 10:23).

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OBEDIENCE IS THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

Jerry L. Martin

It has been said that no organization or institution will rise above its leadership. We see around us every day, in every sphere of our lives, consequences of a lack of obedience and the crucial need for proper leadership when it comes to obedience. In the most important sphere of life, our spiritual relationship with God, true leaders are those who are obedient to God themselves and inspire others to obey God. The price of true success is complete obedience to God's commands. Spiritual leaders are charged to demonstrate respect for God by their obedience. In the Old Testament the importance of the link between leadership and obedience is demonstrated by God's reaction to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, Moses, and Samuel (Genesis 3:1-24; Numbers 20:1-12; 1 Samuel 15:11-23). In contrast, it was Joshua's obedience to God's commandments that assured not only his personal success, but also the success of the nation of Israel (Joshua 1:6-9; 24:15-31). There are few New Testament books that emphasize the crucial nature of obedience like the letter Paul wrote to Titus. Paul, as an Apostle, writes to Titus, an evangelist, to see to it that the congregations on Crete had proper spiritual leadership that would assure obedience to God's commandments. In chapter one we glean insight into the price of obedience.

The prescription for success is obedience (1:1-4). Those who know

how to be servants according to truth, like Paul did (1:1) will submit readily and completely to God's commands. Such servants have great confidence in the promises of God (1:2). They accept the responsibility to preach His word and follow His commandments. They instill in and nurture the growth of faith in others (1:4).

The preparation for success requires obedience (1:5). Paul stated to Titus, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." In order to have necessary leadership in the church God's plan has to be followed. There needs to be a recognition of those things that are lacking. Things need to always be "set in order" before men are placed into leadership roles (Acts 14:21-23; Ephesians 4:1-11).

The profile of success requires obedience (1:6-9). When the inspired guidelines are followed and the qualifications are met, the profile for leadership becomes clear. A leader in the Lord's church will be seen "as the faithful steward of God" (1:6,7; 1 Corinthians 4:1,2). He will conduct himself as a man of God and a loving shepherd (1:7-8). He will always be a diligent student of and a vessel for God's Word (1:9; 2 Timothy 2:20,21).

The purpose of success requires obedience (1:9-16). There are grave responsibilities that a man must

understand before he assumes the work of a leader in the Lord's church. It is the obedient leader that must be able and willing to recognize and refute false teachers and protect the church from the harm they intend to inflict (1:9b-11; Acts 20:28-32). Leadership is to provide constant instruction to the saints in a way they can be "sound in the faith" and avoid being lured back into harms' way (1:12-16). With competent, confident, courageous and obedient spiritual leadership, success will be assured in every generation.

The synopsis of the link between obedience and spiritual success is presented in the second chapter of Titus.

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee" (Titus 2:11-15).

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THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR OBEDIENCE

Ashley Kizer

No one knows the mind of God better than God Himself. It is impossible for us to use our human reasoning to suppose what His will might be. Though we were created in His image, we do not think like He thinks (cf. Genesis 1:26, 27). Isaiah was speaking for God when he wrote, “For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

The mind of God will not change in regard to His desire. Malachi wrote, “For I *am* the LORD, I change not...” (Malachi 3:6). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). It is true that God has changed the way that He distributes His Word to mankind. The Hebrews writer began his epistle by stating, “God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son...” (1:1). Man’s system of worship has changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament. We now have a “better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (8:6). However, these changes came about because of God’s will and not the will of man.

Many people assume that they know God better than He knows Himself. Perhaps this was the case with King Saul, who thought it best to spare King Agag and some choice livestock even though he had been commanded to “utterly destroy” the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:3). We can certainly understand his reasoning: “...the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed” (v. 15). Now compare Saul’s description of his actions to what he had been

explicitly commanded by God: “...utterly destroy all that they have...slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (v. 3). Saul had done most of what God had commanded him, however he was still considered disobedient (cf. vv. 11, 19, 23).

God did not take lightly the disobedience of King Saul. The king was harshly rebuked by the prophet Samuel and told that his kingdom would be taken away and given to someone that was “better” than him (v. 28). There was no probation or suspension with pay; no second chances were discussed. It was simply a matter of fact: since Saul had rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord had rejected him from being king over Israel.

Sometimes we forget that God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). As Samuel told King Saul, “...the Strength of Israel will not lie or repent: for he *is* not a man, that he should repent” (1 Samuel 15:29). Our focus should be directed toward being “transformed” by the renewing of our minds, not striving to find alternatives to God’s will (Romans 12:2). God has said through his prophet Samuel, “Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). Anything but obedience is classified as “rebellion” in God’s eyes, so we should be conscientious about following His commands (v. 23). There is simply no substitute for obedience to God.

Emotion is no substitute for obedience. The prophets of Baal “cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them” (1 Kings 18:28). However, their gods could not bring fire down to consume their sacrifice (v. 29). Yes, they were full of sincerity and emotion. But their end was found at the brook Kishon,

where God’s prophet Elijah slew all 450 of them (v. 40).

Hard work is no substitute for obedience. Cornelius was a man who is described in the book of Acts as being “a devout *man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). Yet God sent the Apostle Peter to his household so they could hear the truth and be obedient to it (v. 48).

Church attendance is no substitute for obedience. Certainly, we are commanded to be faithful to “the assembling of ourselves together,” but church attendance alone cannot be honestly described as the “whole *duty* of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). John wrote about a man named Diotrephes who was an elder of the church. He was certainly faithful to the assembling of the church because he loved to “have the preeminence among them...” (3 John 1:9). However, his church attendance did not keep John from describing him as “evil” (v. 11).

Connections to others are no substitute for obedience. Even Jesus’ flesh and blood did not get any special treatment while He was here on Earth. On one occasion, Matthew tells us that He was teaching a group of people, while His mother and brothers stood outside requesting to speak to Him (cf. Matthew 12:47). However, He dismissed the request by stating that His true family members were those who were obedient to the “Father which is in heaven” (v. 50).

There is absolutely no substitute for obedience to God. After years of searching, the wise King Solomon wrote, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole *duty* of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

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Joshua -Our Example of Obedience by Chuck Webster-----continued from page 25

Joshua knew that grace did not nullify the need for obedience.

There are extremes on most issues, and the relationship between grace and obedience is no exception. Some seem to think that if we can just obey perfectly, then we might be able to eliminate our need for grace. Others go to the other extreme and argue that God's grace and any kind of human response are mutually exclusive. Just relax, sit back, and enjoy the blessings, they seem to say. But neither extreme teaches Bible truth, and an example in Joshua's life displays a picture of God's grace and human obedience. And the Lord said to Joshua: See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor (Joshua 6:2). That must have been hard for Joshua to understand, because the army behind him was not exactly an elite fighting unit, and Jericho was ready for them (v. 1). Just a few days after God said this, though, Jericho's walls were lying flat on the ground, and Joshua and his troops were inside the city (v. 20). So what happened between God's saying the city was

Joshua's and the actual fall of the city? In that answer lies a fascinating truth about grace and obedience.

God clearly said that He had given the city to the people, which is His *grace*. They had done nothing to deserve it. But immediately after this statement God gave instructions on what the people should do to possess the city (vv. 3-5), which was *obedience*. Here's the gift, God said, and here is what you do to accept the gift.

Now suppose Joshua understood grace the way some people do today. He might have stopped listening when God said the city was his and simply expected to watch God give him the city. After all, God's grace is so big and powerful, certainly he does not need our help. Joshua did not do that, of course, because he knew that gifts from God do not eliminate the need for us to accept them. He understood that God's grace was contingent on the people's obedience. When the battle was over, he also understood that it wasn't Israel's military might that led to the victory. Jericho belonged to Israel because of God's

power and mercy, not anything the people had done.

And so it is today. We obey, not to earn salvation or somehow achieve a level of goodness so that we deserve blessings from God. We obey *because* of God's grace and because of our own inability to save ourselves. A classic example is baptism instead of mocking God's grace, it is actually a human response of obedience to the goodness of God (cf. Romans 6:3-5).

Obedience is a bad word in some circles today, even in some religious circles. But God has always valued obedience in His people, and He expects us to seek His will in all that we do. When Joshua died, he was given a simple title: the servant of the Lord (Joshua 24:29). If we obey, and if we do so with the proper motivation, God will use that same expression to describe us. The servants of the Lord are those who seek to obey everything that God has said, no matter what happens.

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