

LeaderLesson 9: Obedience in Scripture

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March 12, 2013

[This LeaderLesson is adapted from the book, A Life of Obedience by Andrew Murray. Since focused obedience is our theme for 2013, we will concentrate on the topic of obedience for the next several issues. Pray with me that God will guide us toward greater obedience to Him for His glory and the building of His Church. – Bob Lowman, Jr.]

To prepare the way for the study of obedience in Scripture, we need to go to God's Word to find the mind of God. First, we must take Scripture as a whole. Begin with the Garden of Eden. It also refers to where the saints will dwell forever with God in eternity. In Genesis 2:16 we read, "And the Lord God commanded the man..." And later (3:11), "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Note how obedience to the command is the one virtue of Paradise, the one condition of man's abiding there, the one thing his Creator asks of him. Nothing is said of faith or humility or love – obedience covers all. Equally as supreme as the claim and authority of God is the demand for obedience – the one thing that decides man's destiny. To obey is the one thing required.

Turn now from the beginning of the Bible to the end. In the last chapter we read (Revelation 22:14), "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life." From the beginning to end, from Paradise lost to Paradise regained, the law is unchanged: it is obedience that gives access to the tree of life and the favor of God.

How was the change effected? The Cross of Christ. From disobedience at the beginning that closed the way to the tree of life, to obedience at the end that gained entrance to it again, that which stands midway between the beginning and the end is the Cross of Christ. Romans 5:19 says, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." And Philippians 2:8-9 – "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedience to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him." See also Hebrews 5:8-9: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." In these verses we can see how the whole redemption of Christ consists in restoring obedience to its place. The beauty of His salvation consists of this, that He brings us back to the life of obedience, through which alone the creature can give the Creator the glory due to Him, or receive the glory of which his Creator desires him to partake. Paradise, Calvary, heaven, all proclaim with one voice: Child of God, the first and the last thing your God asks of you is simple, universal, unchanging obedience.

Turn to the Old Testament. Especially notice how, with any new beginning in the history of God's kingdom, obedience always comes into special prominence. As to Noah, who became the new father of the human race, we find four times written, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did" (Genesis 6:22; 7:5, 9, 16). It is the one who does what God commands to whom God can entrust His work. Think of Abraham: "By faith Abraham *obeyed*" (Hebrews 11:8). When he had been forty years in the school of faith-obedience, God came to perfect his faith and to crown it with His fullest blessing. Nothing could fit Abraham for this but a crowning act of obedience. When he had bound his son on the altar, God came and said to him, "By Myself I have sworn...In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:16-18).

When will we learn how unspeakably pleasing obedience is in God's sight, and how immeasurable the reward He gives for it? The way to be a blessing to the world is to be a people of obedience, known by God and the world by this one mark – a will completely yielded to God's will.

After forty years' wandering in the wilderness, and its terrible revelation of the fruit of disobedience, there was again a new beginning when the people were about to enter Canaan. Read Deuteronomy and all that Moses spoke when in sight of the land. You will find there is no book in the Bible that uses the word **obey** so frequently or speaks so much of the blessing obedience will certainly bring. The whole is summed up in the words "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...and the curse, if you do not obey" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

"...the blessing, if you obey..." is the keynote of the blessed life. Canaan, just like the Garden, and heaven itself, can only be a place of blessing if it is a place of obedience. Oh, that we would grasp it! Beware of praying only for a blessing. Let us seek first obedience, and God will supply the blessing. Our constant question as a Christian should be "How can I obey and please God perfectly?"

Just one more word from the Old Testament: next to Deuteronomy, Jeremiah uses most the word *obey*. How sad to see that it is mostly in connection with the complaint that the people had not obeyed. God sums up all His dealings with the fathers in one thought: "For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people'" (Jeremiah 7:22-23). Oh, that we could learn: All that God speaks of sacrifices, even of the sacrifice of His beloved Son, is subordinate to the one thing: that all be restored to full obedience. Into all the inconceivable meaning of the words "I will be your God," there is no entrance but one: to obey His voice.

Now let us look at the New Testament. Here the prominence our Lord gives to obedience comes to mind at once. Jesus always confessed to men, "I seek not My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Of all He did and of all He suffered, even unto death, He said, "This commandment have I received of My Father."

If we turn to His teaching, we find throughout that the obedience He rendered is the same He requires of everyone who would be His disciple. During His whole ministry, from beginning to end, obedience was the very gateway to finding salvation. In the Sermon on the Mount He gives the admonition: "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" (Matthew 7:21). And in His farewell discourse, how wonderfully He reveals the spiritual character of true obedience as it is born of love, is inspired by it, and as it opens the way into the love of God: "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever...He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:15-16, 21, 23). No words could express more simply or more powerfully the inconceivably glorious value Christ puts on obedience, with its twofold possibility: Obedience is only possible to a loving heart, but it also makes possible all that God has to give us through His wonderful Holy Spirit, primarily His indwelling presence. I know of no passage in Scripture (John 14) that gives a higher revelation of the spiritual life or the power of loving obedience as its condition. Let us pray earnestly that the light of the Holy Spirit may infuse our daily obedience with His glory.

We find in Acts two messages of Peter's that show how our Lord's teaching had become part of him. (1) "We ought to obey God rather than men" (5:29). (2) "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him" (5:32). Full obedience is faithfulness unto death. Nothing on earth hinders the one who has given himself to God.

Paul singles out the phrase "**obedience to the faith among all nations for His name**" (Romans 1:5) as his motto for his service as an apostle. As Adam's disobedience, and ours, causes death, so the obedience of Christ, and ours, is the way of restoration to God and His favor.

James warns us not to be hearers of the Word only, but doers, and gives us an example in Abraham, who was justified by faith, but perfected by his works (James 1:22).

In Peter's first epistle, chapter one, we see the place of obedience. In verse 2, he speaks to the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for *obedience* and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." This points to obedience as the eternal purpose of the Father, the great objective of the work of the Spirit, and a chief factor in the salvation of Christ. He continues, "As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1:14-15). **Obedience is the starting point of true holiness.** In verse 22, we read, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth..." The acceptance of the truth of God was not merely a matter of intellectual assent or emotional persuasion; rather, it was submission of the whole life to the supremacy of the truth of God. The Christian life was, in the first place, obedience.

John uses strong statements: "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). **Obedience is the hallmark of Christian character.** He says, "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (3:22). Obedience is the secret of a good conscience and of the confidence that God hears us. The obedience that keeps His commandments becomes the outward expression of our love for God.

We may ask ourselves, "Does obedience take that place in my heart and life?" Have we given obedience the place of authority that God intends it to have: the motivation of our every action and our boldness to approach Him? If we yield ourselves to the searching of God's Spirit, we may find that we have not given implicit obedience the importance it deserves in our life, and that this is the cause of our failure in prayer and in our work. The deeper blessings of God's grace and the full enjoyment of God's love and nearness have been beyond our reach simply because obedience was never given the importance God gives it – the starting point and the goal of our Christian life.

May God awake in us an earnest desire to know His will fully concerning this truth. Let us as the Holy Spirit to show us how far short we fall in our Christian life where obedience does not rule. May He help us see how that life can be exchanged for one of full surrender to absolute obedience to God's will in all things. As the disobedience of Adam in the garden closed the gate, and the obedience of the Second Adam opened it, obedience in us opens the way for God to come and dwell in our hearts and be at home there.

May God make obedience – the one sacrifice He asks of us – the sacrifice we freely offer Him.

[Adapted from *A Life of Obedience* by Andrew Murray, chapter 1. (Bethany House, 2004)]

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