

Be Obedient and Sin Not

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's commands and the relationship between obedience and salvation, highlighting the need for a whole Christ and the dangers of dividing Christ's offices.

Duration: 40:32

Scripture: Psalm 103:20, Ezekiel 1:20-21, Matthew 11:30, John 3:4, Romans 5:19, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:2, 1 Peter 1:2, 1 Peter 1:14, 1 John 2:3-4

Topics: "Obedience", "Lordship Of Christ"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the necessity of obedience in the Christian life, arguing that true believers are inherently obedient children of God. He explains that salvation cannot exist without obedience, as sin is fundamentally rebellion against divine authority. Tozer critiques the notion that one can accept Christ as Savior without also acknowledging Him as Lord, asserting that such a divided relationship is a misunderstanding of the Gospel. He highlights that both heaven and hell are defined by obedience and disobedience, respectively, urging listeners to fully surrender to God's will. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a return to the understanding that accepting Christ means embracing His lordship and the obligation to obey Him.

Transcript

Now, in the book of 1 Peter, the 14th verse, 14th verse, As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. I don't intend to read further than that, because we've been reading these verses, but there is a phrase here that has no verb in it, As obedient children. Now, we break in with those words, As obedient children, we break into, rather unceremoniously, a long apostolic exhortation, filled with verbs, words of action, where he says, for instance, gird up and hope, and be holy, and love one another.

Those are commands, strong commands. Now we have sandwiched in here, the little phrase, As obedient children, there's no verb in it. And he does not even say here, be obedient.

Then we'd have a strong exhortation, but it's written here. He does not exhort us here to be obedient. He says, As obedient, do so and so.

I make a point of this, in order to show you that Peter is not here exhorting us to obedience. He is assuming obedience by the fact that we are believers. And Peter wrote to these brethren, who are elect

according to the foreknowledge of God, and so on, and gathered throughout Pontus, Asia, and Cappadocia.

He assumed by the fact that they were brethren, that they were elect, that they were saved and obedient. He assumed that they would be obedient children. So he did not say, Now be obedient.

Though I do not say that might not have been said elsewhere in Scripture. But I do say that Peter here did not. He only said, Assuming that you are believers, I therefore gather that you are also obedient.

So now, as obedient children, do so and so. And what we are said to do cannot come within the scope of our examination today. So we're going to talk about this, obedient children.

And point out that obedience is taught in the entire Bible. And that it is one of the toughest requirements of the Christian life. And yet apart from obedience there can be no salvation.

Salvation without obedience is a self-contradictory impossibility. Because the essence of sin is rebellion against the divine authority. Let's sort of relax and shove that around a little, look at it from all sides, and note that the essence of sin was rebellion against the divine authority.

Thou shalt not eat. And the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. But Adam and Eve, in spite of the strong prohibition, set forth their hands and tasted of the fruit.

And thus they disobeyed and rebelled. And in their rebellion brought sin upon themselves. For sin was rebellion.

It says in Romans 5, by one man's disobedience. That by one man's disobedience, that stern word from the Holy Ghost through Paul. By one man's disobedience.

So disobedience wrought the downfall of the world. And in John 3 it says plainly that sin is lawlessness. Sin is disobedience to the law of God.

And it says in Ephesians 2 that the people of the world are children of disobedience. Children of disobedience. Now that word children there, as here, does not mean, I think in Spanish they say *niña*.

In Scottish they say *band*. In English we say toddlers. It does not mean that.

It means, it is an idiomatic expression. And it means that it springs out of and rests upon and is characterized by. As when someone reached a certain age and was made a son of the law.

You remember Dr. Sligoman told about it. That is he was put under obedience to the law and called a son of the law. Now it did not mean he was begotten by the law and called his law a father.

It was an expression calling, well we have an expression like it when we talk about sons of freedom. We sing about Americans being sons of freedom. And it means the same thing.

So we said that the people of the world are children of disobedience. It characterizes them. They breathe it.

They exhale it. They inhale it. It colors them.

It conditions them. It shapes them. It molds them.

It is a part of them and they are a part of it. They are sons of disobedience as the Americans are supposed to be, sons of freedom. Now the whole question here is, and the whole question before human race is, who is God? Broken down into a series of questions.

The questions are, to whom do I belong? And to whom do I owe allegiance? And who has authority to require obedience of me? Now those are three pretty questions. To whom do I belong? And to whom do I, should I, or do I owe allegiance? And who has authority to require obedience of me? And we Americans, I suppose, probably among all the peoples of the world, are the hardest people to get to obey anybody. Because we are sons of freedom.

We were the outcropping of a revolt. We revolted. We poured tea overboard in Boston Harbor.

We made speeches and said that the sound of the clash of arms was carried on every wind that blows from the Boston Commons. Patrick Henry, wasn't it? Or somebody. And we said we would not lie so kindly by and wear the chains of the British.

And he ended that famous oration with a pure oration, give me liberty or give me death. And that's in the American blood, give me liberty or give me death. And when anyone says, you owe obedience, we bristle immediately.

At least we wanted to have it explained to us. Because we don't take kindly to being obedient to anybody. Now, the children of the world have their answers.

Through the question, who is boss? They have their answers. The answer to the question, to whom do I belong, is simply, I belong to myself. Well, even the Bible gives this rather silly saying that I used to hear as a boy.

When you told a child to keep still, he would say, my mouth's my own. I will speak when I please. That was the equivalent of some of the later it was could do, or 23.

And, you know, it's something new all the time. And I never tried to keep up with them. But that was very, that was very, they'd say, hey, and somebody would say, straws cheaper.

That was a big one in that day, too, you know. And keep still, my mouth's my own, I'll talk when I please. And the Bible even tells us that some grown-up people back there said, my mouth's my own, the Lord can't tell me when to talk.

Now that's the answer that the world gives, to whom do I belong. I belong to myself. We make a great deal out of that.

Individualism, we call it. Individuality. And the right of self-determination.

And the question, to whom do I owe allegiance? The answer is, I owe allegiance to nobody. But I give allegiance to whomsoever I please. That's the answer of the sinful heart.

Particularly, that's the answer of the American heart. I owe allegiance to nobody. I give allegiance to whom I please.

And the answer to the question, who has authority to require obedience of me, is this. No one has such authority. Even the laws of my country, I made them myself.

That's why an American can bail bail law without loss of faith. He said, I made that law. I went to the polls.

I elected my representative. I sent him to Springfield or Washington. And he made the law.

And if I don't like it, I can recall him next election. I am not putting my neck under the heel of any man. I am obeying laws which I myself have made.

That's the wonderful liberty and freedom and beauty and also smear of the American way of life. So the answer to, who has authority to command obedience? The answer of our heart is, no one has that authority. So we say, I have the right of self-determination.

Now I'd like to talk a little about that. You can't hear a politician talk for 20 minutes until he drags that in. The right of self-determination.

And I'm glad we have it here in this country. I'm glad, deeply grateful before God this Thanksgiving season, that I'm not in Russia. That I'm not in China.

That I'm not in East Germany. That I'm not in any of the so-called satellites. They should be called slave nations.

Glad that we have our flag to fly and tell us that we have the right of self-determination. That's good. And I wouldn't say in any wise anything that would reflect even remotely on this wonderful truth.

I think we all ought to get on our knees and spend a half an hour this next Thursday thanking God we live in America. But while God has given us the right of self-power of self-determination, he has not given us the right of self-determination. Now let me explain that.

Free will means that God has given me the power of self-determination. He gave it to Adam and Eve. He said, now that tree with that fruit is there, and it is, it's there.

You have a free will, you can do as you please, roam at will, go to sleep, get up, eat what you please, do as you please, with one exception. I have forbidden you to eat of that tree. They have the power of self-determination.

But they did not have the right of self-determination. There is a difference there. If God had not given us the power of self-determination, then we would be automatons.

You have a car sitting out in front. It may be a little one or a big one, a Toyota, Chrysler, Packard, whatever it may be. All right, it's sitting out there.

It has no power of self-determination. Though it may have cost you \$3,000, it will sit where it is until it's rushed out. It will never move from there and let you move it, or somebody else move it.

It will never move from there. It has not the power of self-determination. That airplane, which we're not hearing these foggy days, but that airplane up yonder in the blue, has not the power of self-determination.

A man sits nonchalantly behind the little half-wheel and determines where that plane is going to go, and it has no power to determine its own destiny. Now, if God had made us automobiles or airplanes, simply shiny, beautiful machines, then we would not have had the power of self-determination. But since he gave us of his own sovereignty and made us to be moral creatures, he has given us the right, or rather the

power, not the right, but the power of self-determination.

I keep using the word right because I hear it so often in political speeches and read it so much in political literature, but actually it's power and not right. Now, we do not have the right of self-determination because God has given us the power to choose good or evil, but he has not given us the right to choose evil. Seeing that God is a whole God and seeing that we are moral creatures, then we have the power but not the right to choose evil.

No man has any right to lie. We have the power to lie, but no man has any right to lie. We have the power to say, oh, I can go out and get myself a better coat than the one I wore here today and flip it out of the side door and get away with it.

But I have that power, but I do not have that right. I have the power to turn on my friend here, and with a little treat each night, sharp as a razor, I could kill him. But I do not have the right to do it, most of you think.

But I do not have the right to do it. I have only the power to do it. You only have a right to be good.

You never have a right to be bad because God is good. You only have a right to be holy. You never have a right to be unholy.

And if you are unholy, you usurp a right that is not yours. Adam and Eve had no moral right to the trees of good and evil, but they took it and they usurped the power that was not their right, except it was not theirs because they had the power. I remember and looked it up to see if I was right, and I was.

In this particular instance I often am not. But Tennyson said something in his own memorial that stuck in my mind from years back, and I checked, and it reads like this. Strange little two-line affair.

He says, Our wills are ours. Even though Tennyson wrote that, it stands badly. Our wills are ours.

We know not how. Our wills are ours to make them thine. He acknowledged in this great religious poem and memorial, he acknowledged that we have wills that belong to us.

Our wills are ours. And then he says rather vaguely, we know not how. It's all beyond us, this deep mystery of man's free will.

It's all too much for us. Our wills are ours, we know not how. Then he girds himself up and gets hold of himself and says, Yes, our wills are ours to make them thine.

And there the only right we have is to make our wills the will of God. Or rather to make the will of God our will. And then we do not violate our will, we purify our will.

We do not destroy it, we sanctify it. So that we have the power of self-determination, but we do not have the right of self-determination. Because we are what we are and God is who and what he is.

God is the sovereign. We are his teachers, he is the creator. And therefore he has a right to command and we have the obligation to obey.

But it's a happy obligation, I might say. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. Now I want to point out here, when I consider a notable heritage which has sprung out of the misunderstanding of this whole

business of obedience.

And it's found in full gospel circles and I have no question but what, before I began to pray and think and meditate and contemplate and see the effects of it, I preached it myself, maybe even in this church. But it certainly leaves a lot of modifying and a great many writers and qualifiers in order to save us from being really in error about this. Here is what I consider a bad teaching.

I'll put it in three lines for you. First, that we are saved by accepting Christ as our savior. Two, we are sanctified by accepting Christ as our Lord.

Three, that we may do the first without doing the second. Now I have been taught that and I think that is woven into most full gospel literature. Almost everybody that gets up and preaches to young people and exhorts them to consecrate themselves to God and yield and surrender and be filled with spirit, they all begin by saying, When you are saved, now that's good.

You are saved by taking Jesus Christ as your savior. Now you will be filled with his spirit when you will take him as your Lord. And the implication is, they can take him as their savior without taking him as their Lord and they do not even allow us to infer it.

They sometimes say it outright. I came across it the other day somewhere, either in a magazine article or a book or radio sermon. I don't know which.

I don't remember. But it was preached by a good man and I forge it a little bit of good. But it is very far from being true because we have here the doctrine that Christ may sustain toward us a divided relationship.

That our Lord Jesus Christ can be our savior without being our Lord. That we can be saved without obeying a sovereign Lord. Now that, I say, is so commonly preached that to oppose it or object to it is to put your neck far out the window in the rain.

Now what the Bible says about it is this. God hath made this same Jesus whom he hath crucified, both Lord and Christ. Jesus means Savior.

Lord means Sovereign. Christ means Anointed One. And he therefore preached to them not Jesus as Savior.

He preached to them Jesus as Lord and Christ and Savior. And he never divided his offices. In Romans 10, 8 to 13.

Now I want to read that because I don't want to get it wrong. Romans 10, 8 it says. What says it? The word is nigh thee even in thy mouth and in thy heart.

That is the word of faith which we preach. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved. He did not say that thou shalt believe or confess with thy mouth the Savior.

He said thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus. For with the heart man believes under righteousness and with the mouth confessions made under salvation. For there is no difference between Jew and Greek.

For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Three times he calls him Lord here in this passage telling us how to be saved.

And says that faith in the Lord Jesus plus confession of that faith to the world brings salvation to us. So the Bible doesn't take the attitude that you can divide the offices of Jesus receiving today a Savior and ten years from now maybe get around to owning him as Lord. That I say is no small heresy.

But you hear it almost everywhere you go. 1 Peter 1, 2 says that we are elected according to the foreknowledge of God the Father to sanctification of the spirit unto obedience. So salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred scriptures.

But we say come to him, you don't have to obey, you don't have to change anything, do anything, order anything, give up anything, surrender anything, give back anything, do anything, just come to him and believe in him as Savior. So they come and believe as Savior. And later on they attend a deeper life conference and somebody says now you that have received him as Savior how would you like to take him as Lord tonight? How utterly horrible that is.

And yet you hear it. Because it is a divided personality. It is urging men to believe on a divided Christ.

And it is allowing them to exercise one office now and exercise the next office maybe ten years from now. I don't believe it. I believe that it is all wrong.

Now, my brethren, no one can receive half a Christ or a third of a Christ or a quarter of a Christ. We are saved by believing not on an office nor a work. You hear people say come and believe on the finished work.

No, the Bible never says it. The Bible never tells us we're to believe on an office nor to believe on a work but we're to believe on the Lord who did that work and holds those offices. And a man when he believes on Jesus Christ must believe on the whole Lord Jesus Christ and not make any reservations.

Anybody that slips in, like I might slip in and go to a hospital and say I'd like to have a blood transfusion or I'd like to have an x-ray of my gallbladder. And so I go in and get their service and then wave goodbye and I owe them nothing. I've said it.

And I owe them no allegiance. The next time I can go to Bernardus I'll show I don't owe them anything. I'm saved up.

They've done for me what I wanted. They've exercised their office as a blood transfusion or an x-ray technician and I have what I wanted and I go. I'm better now and because of that, okay.

But I owe them nothing. So we say Jesus is a kind of a divine nurse and we go to him when his skin has made us sick and say, Lord, heal me, help me, Lord. And he blesses his others and we say goodbye and go in and read it.

But the Bible never anywhere gives it any such a grotesque context. There's none in the Bible. None in the Gospels, none in the Epistles.

And none in the Psalms, which are often a commentary on Epistles and Gospels. Nowhere is ever, if ever, given us to believe that we can use Jesus as a Savior and not own him as a Lord. He is the Lord and as the Lord he saves us because he has the other offices of Savior and Christ and high priest and wisdom

and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

He's all these things and all of these are embodied in him as Christ the Lord. And when I come to him, I don't come as a Jewish real estate man carefully saying I'll take this but I won't take that. I don't come to Christ that I might buy furniture and say I'll take this chair but I don't want that bed.

Dividing it up, no church. Either all of Christ or none of Christ. And we need to preach again a whole Christ to the world.

A Christ we don't have to apologize for. A Christ we can't divide and that won't be divided. A Christ who will either be Lord of all or he will not be Lord at all.

Now salvation restores the right what a fellow called a creator-teacher relationship because it acknowledges God's right to command communion. You see in our time, friends, we have overemphasized the psychology of sin, sinnership or sinnerhood. We've overemphasized it.

We point out too much that the woe of the sinner, the grief of the sinner, the heavy load of the sinner, the burden, we've got all that but we've overemphasized it. And we have overlooked the fact that a sinner is not only heavy laden but he's a rebel against properly constituted authority. And that's what makes sin, sin.

We're rebels. We're sons of disobedience. Sin is the breaking of the law and we're in rebellion and we're fugitives from the just laws of God while we're sinners.

Certainly we're heartbroken, certainly. Let a man escape from the bride, well, let this man who kidnapped and killed the innocent child escape from the Missouri penitentiary. Sure he'll have grief.

Sure he'll bark his sins on logs and fences as he flies. Sure he'll be hungry. Sure he'll have to sleep in caves and swamps and wherever he may be.

Certainly he'll get weary and he'll get a long beard and he'll be tired and have charley horses and perhaps get a cold and certainly all that will happen. That is incidental to the fact that he is a fugitive from justice and a rebel against law. And so sinners, sure they're heartbroken, sure they carry a heavy load.

Certainly they labor and are heavy laden, most surely. And the Bible takes full account of that. But that is only incidental to the fact that the reason they're what they are is they have rebelled against the love of God and they're fugitives from divine justice.

If that could constitute sin, not the fact that I have a heavy heart and miserable and sad and all that, that's one of the outcroppings of sin. But the root of sin is rebellion against law. It's saying, I belong to myself.

I owe allegiance to nobody unless I choose to give it. That's the essence of sin. But salvation restores that, I mean reverses that and restores the old relationship.

And the first thing the returning sinner does is to say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and I'm no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. And thus in repentance we reverse that situation and meekly submit to the word of God and to the will of God when we believe in our faith.

Now, the happiness of all the moral creatures lies right here in obedience to God. Psalm 103 20, Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of these words. Where angels in heaven find their complete freedom and complete happiness.

In obeying the commandments of God. Instead of finding it a tyranny, they find it a delight. And I've been looking over again that whole first chapter of Ezekiel.

It's mystery, mystery, mystery. I don't understand. Creatures there with four faces and four wings.

Strange little creatures going string, string, string. Had wheels, no wheels in the middle of the wheels. And there was fire coming out of the north and there were creatures that went straight ahead and there were creatures that lowered their wings and waved them.

And there were strange beautiful creatures and they were all having a time of their life. Utterly completely delighted with the presence of God and that they could serve God. Heaven is a place of surrender to the whole will of God and it is heaven because it is such a place.

Now, conclusion. The sum of the matter is this. That everything else that can be said about hell may be true, but this one thing is the essence.

That hell is the world of disobedience. Hell is the world of the rebel. Hell is the alcatraz for the unreconstructed rebels who would not surrender to the will of God.

And heaven is the world of obedient children. Whatever else we may say of its pearly gates and its golden streets, they're just the walls in its city foresquare. Heaven is heaven because it is the world of obedient children having found their sphere, the sphere where they normally operate, moral creatures, children of the most high God.

And heaven is heaven because of that. Hell is hell not because of worms and fire, though I believe certainly they're both there. Jesus said that they were there.

You might endure worms and fire, but for a moral creature, you know, it is where he is because he is a rebel. He has no faith left, no self-respect left, no hope left, nobility left, nothing left. So he is finding hell the world of the disobedient.

And each person now is deciding which world he's going to inhabit. He's got to decide it now. So let it not come as you might go up onto a stage to be interviewed over a radio or to get your diploma out of school.

Let it not go sprightly and carefully to the Lord Jesus and say, I'm coming for some help, Lord Jesus. I understand you're the Savior. I'm going to believe on thee and be saved.

And then turn away and say, excuse me, I'll think about the other matter later. The matter of lordship and allegiance and obedience, I'll think of that later. I warn you, you'll get no help from me, for the Lord will not save those whom he cannot command.

He will not divide his officers. You cannot believe on a half Christ. We take him for what he is, the anointed Savior and Lord, who is King of kings and Lord of all lords, and who saves us with the understanding that he can also guide our lives for the rest of the time.

So while I believe in the deeper life, certainly you well know that, dear, I believe that we are mistaken when we attach the deeper life on to an imperfect salvation gotten imperfectly by an imperfect concept of the whole thing. Under Finney and Wesley and such men as that, no man ever would dare to rise in meeting and say, I'm a Christian, who had not surrendered his whole being to God and had taken Jesus Christ as his Lord as well as his Savior and repented to the roots of his being and brought himself under obedience to the will of the Lord. Then he could say, I'm saved.

We let him say, you're saved, no matter how imperfect it all is. Then later on, tack on the deeper life and say, all right, now let's consider the Lordship of Jesus. Don't you think you owe him obedience? You owe him obedience from the second you came to him for help.

And if we do not give him that obedience, I have a reason to wonder if we're really convergent. I see people do things and hear them having done things and watch them operate, and I'm made to question whether they're convergent or not or ever were. And I believe it's because of faulty teaching to begin with.

They thought the Lord was a hospital and he was their chief of staff in a hospital, picked up full of sinners that got in trouble. Go to him and say, dear Lord, I come to you weeping, I'm a poor man, now help me. The Lord helps us when we go our way.

It's bad teaching, brethren, and it leads to self-deception. Let us look at him high there, wearing this crown, being Lord of lords and king of all kings forever, having his perfect moral rights of full obedience from all of his faithful people. There's a deeper life, all right, but that's not worth convincing.

Now may God bless these words, give us sober thoughts, and I want you to take what I've said, swallow it down, without giving it thought. But if after careful searching of the Scriptures and reading of the New Testament you think I'm wrong, then all right. But if after reading and searching the Bible you see that I've given the germ of truth here, then I urge you, do something about it.

And don't go blithely on your way believing that you're saved when perhaps you're not saved at all. For you have believed imperfectly upon a divided Savior, which is no Savior at all. May God grant it's not true what it is, we still have time to do something about it.

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