

Key Words: Obedience

by J. Glyn Owen

Obedience is a necessity in the Christian life, and the new covenant provides a solution to the problem of disobedience through the Holy Spirit and the ability to obey God's commands.

Duration: 47:20

Scripture: Exodus 19:5-6, Exodus 19:8, Exodus 24:3, Exodus 24:7, Romans 6:7, Romans 6:12-13

Topics: "Obedience"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of dedicating one's life to God and obeying His commandments. He references the Israelites in the book of Exodus, who initially pledged to follow God's laws but later became disobedient. The speaker highlights the role of judges and prophets in bringing the people back to their commitment. He then applies this lesson to the present, urging listeners to surrender their bodies and all aspects of their lives to God. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to understand their unity with Christ and to live according to God's imperatives.

Transcript

We come prayerfully then to the subject this morning, the further key word and probably the last in our present series, obedience. Do you find it easy to obey? It's a question we ask the children but it's a question we have to ask one another. Could our relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ be described by him or by others looking on in terms of our obedience to him? Are we known among other Christians as men and women who seek to know the will of God and then to do it? Is this thing and goes under the name obedience? Is it written into my life and your life that we are known as those who are pledged to obey? George Macdonald wrote, I find that the doing of the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about his plan.

Someone had told him that they were never sure about the will of God. His reply in these words is this, that He had very little time to think about the will of God, he was so busy doing it. Another has written, God is too great to be withstood, too just to do wrong, too good to delight in anyone's misery.

We ought therefore quickly to submit to his dispensations as the very best. Spiritual development and maturity does not come by any means that avoids obedience. We may talk about this shortcut to holiness or some other alleged means of cutting corners.

There is no cutting off the corner of obedience. It is written into the warp and woof of biblical Christianity from beginning to end and is doubly so in the New Testament. Two main points this morning and the first is this, obedience is a necessity in the Christian life.

Not a luxury, not an optional extra, obedience is a necessity in the life of a believer. The Apostle Peter addresses the readers of his first letter as God's elect. Then he goes on, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of his blood.

Now, please don't miss that. Whatever God has done for us and the Spirit is doing in us, it is all meant to lead to this, our obedience to God's will and God's word as it is revealed in his only Son, Jesus Christ. The whole thrust of salvation is to make us obey.

There is no bypassing the duty of obedience as far as Scripture is concerned. Obedience then is clearly essential in Scripture as we shall see in a moment. I'm making the statement now and I shall prove it as we go along.

It is a necessary fruit of the saving work of grace wrought by God in our human hearts. Unless I am obedient to God as revealed in Christ and in his word, unless I am obedient, I have no infallible way of proving that God is really my God. He's God to me when I obey him.

I have no real way of proving that Jesus Christ is my Savior other than by obedience to him. I can talk about him, I can sing about him, but the only way I prove that he is more than a talking point to me is when I obey him. I have no other way of proving that the Holy Spirit is in my heart other than by obeying him so that the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit and the grace of the Spirit grow and mature in my life and the will of the Father expressed in the Son is reproduced in me and through me.

Obedience is indispensable. Grace does not, grace does not cancel the necessity of obedience. Whereas disobedience marred the original happy relationship existing between God and his creatures as with Adam and Eve in the garden and with Cain who murdered his brother in Genesis 4 and with a general populace of Noah's Edge and others.

Obedience does the exact opposite. Disobedience puts things wrong. Obedience is the way to realign our lives with God and our wills with his.

Obedience does the exact opposite to disobedience. Obedience links men with God in an indissoluble bond of fellowship and of intimacy and we become as Paul puts it workers together with God. This is evident again in the Old Testament.

Abel offered an offering that was pleasing to God. He obeyed. Enoch walked with God.

Noah built his ark according to God's specifications and on to Abram and and further on. This is the message of the book. Disobedience makes things wrong, puts things topsy-turvy.

Obedience moves in the opposite direction. It rectifies everything and it brings us into an experience of being reconciled to God and of fellowship with him which is deeper than reconciliation. A fellowship with him that brings heaven down to earth.

Now as sin spread its ugly influence upon mankind we are perplexed and even shattered to see that it influenced the most privileged people of all. Not only the unprivileged of the Old Testament but the most privileged. Despite the example of the lustrous Abram in believing God and obeying him and walking for a thousand miles along the Euphrates valley to a spot where God would take him.

Despite Abram's faith, Abram's seed were so openly violently at times opposing the will of God. Though they knew what it was even after they had the law. This is one of the characteristic features of their lives.

Even their supernatural redemption from Egypt after being there for 400 years did not take out the spirit of rebellion from their hearts. Nor did the high privilege of being constituted the covenant people of God on the slopes of Sinai make them obedient. They professed obedience.

God's covenant with them was the product of course of his own infinite grace. But it was conditional. Do you remember the terms? I'm sure you do.

This is a key segment of scripture you can't even understand the New Testament if you are not sure about these principles. Exodus 19 5 and 6 tell us that God spoke to the children of Israel on the slopes of Sinai in these terms. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.

Although the whole earth is mine you will be for me a kingdom of priests. Imagine that a whole nation a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Ere the covenant was ratified God caused Moses to ask Israel three times over one question.

Now some of you will say we've heard you say that before. Well I'm sorry you I have to say it again this morning. Before the covenant was ratified God caused Moses to be quite clear with Israel as to the conditionality a conditional character of the covenant.

Three times over he asked one question. Will you do what God is commanding you? Are you prepared to obey? And three times over they said yes. Let me give them to you.

Exodus 19 8 the people all responded we will do everything the Lord has said. So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. Turn over the page to Exodus 24 and verse 3. When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws they responded with one voice everything the Lord has said we will do.

That's the second time. Exodus 24 and verse 7. Then he took the book of the covenant and he read it to the people again. What a preacher he's saying everything three times over and he's making quite sure they've got the point.

And all that God has said all the laws and all the covenants are read now again before the people. Now he says did you get it? And so we read in verse 7 then he took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded we will do everything the Lord has said we will obey.

Thus did the children of Israel pledge themselves. But though their profession was made in triplicate. Their ensuing actions soon belied their professed dedication to God's terms.

They became again disobedient. Try to break loose that is a term that is used in the Hebrew language. They broke loose.

They kicked against the bricks. They went their own way. They tried to get away from God.

They were disobedient, disloyal. The ministry of the judges in particular and of the prophets was largely a matter of bringing a disobedient people back to the terms they had promised to obey. Now this lack of desire or of determination or of ability whichever may be all three.

To keep their covenant obligations with God by rendering obedience to his laws and statutes. Was a major problem in the ongoing life of ancient Israel. You see they were they shared in the fallen nature of mankind.

And they knew the temptations of the flesh and they knew something about the powers of the devil. And they knew something of what the power of the world of worldliness was. For they lived among a pagan community most of their days.

And they found it very difficult sometimes they didn't have the desire. Sometimes they didn't have the determination. Sometimes they didn't have the ability the capacity to do it.

Let the scripture speak for themselves. God promised something that would deal with all these problems. Isn't it marvelous? You see one of the things you find in the Bible is this.

There are all sorts of problems mounting from one direction or another. Then God suddenly reveals himself as a God who's got the answer to that problem too. God reveals himself as having foreseen and prepared beforehand the answer to this inability, lack of capacity in men and women to do his will.

And he promised them a new covenant. And the new covenant provisions would not only tell them what to do but enable them to do it. Let me read.

Now these are familiar words to most of you I'm sure. Isaiah Jeremiah 31 and verse 31. The time is coming declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

I will it will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt. Because they broke my covenant. Though I was a husband unto them declares the Lord.

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time declares the Lord. Now here it is. I will put my law in their minds and I will write it on their hearts.

I will be their God and they shall be my people. Not in name only but in reality. And in Jeremiah 32 and 40.

I have no time to read more. We have these added words explaining the same principles. And I says God and I will inspire them to fear me.

So that they will never turn away from me. Ezekiel adds to that. It's the same picture but Ezekiel adds something quite a new flavor really to it.

He puts it like this. God says I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and will give you a heart of flesh and mark this.

And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws. God said that. Now have you got the picture? It's all disobedience.

I don't want to do God's will. I don't like God's will. I can't agree with God's will.

I haven't got the power to do God's will. Well my friend once you come into the enjoyment of new covenant blessings of Christian salvation. You will begin to like God's will.

Because he writes his law on your mind and on your heart. And he puts his spirit within you to cause you to move you to inspire you in the way of the statutes. If you want new testament terms.

Paul tells the Philippians work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. How can we do it? Or says he it is God who is working in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. That's exactly what he's talking about.

A Christian is a man or a woman who has entered into possession of new covenant salvation. And that means the desire to do God's will and to obey him. The capacity to do it and to go on doing it.

Such promised provisions were a boon to the God fearing. Of course the faithful were already able to draw grace from God. Enoch did.

Isaac did. Abram did. But this is something different.

This is something over and above that with the law of God written on your heart. So that deep calls unto deep. Now when we come to the new testament then we start there.

We are not where the Israelites were on the slopes of Sinai. We are a changed people. A regenerate people.

God has taken away the heart of stone and he's given us a heart of flesh. He's put his own Holy Spirit within us. I trust there is no man or woman here this morning who doesn't know what that means.

If you're a believer God has put his spirit in your heart. Now think what that means. The very spirit in God that makes him act as he does is in you.

And if the spirit of God is in you, you will want to do what God wants to do. And you will want to be what God is. And by the incoming of the spirit of God into our human lives, obedience becomes not only a necessity but a possibility.

My second point this morning is this. Disobedience is most reprehensible in those who are heirs of new covenant provisions, new testament provisions. Now that is exactly what we are.

Let it be clearly said, were it only for the sake of young believers among us this morning whom we're always glad to welcome. We salute those of you who've come to the Lord Jesus recently and I'm glad to have you. Let it be said were it only for for for younger Christians to whom this is new that all believers this side of Bethlehem, this side of Calvary, this side of the resurrection, this side of Pentecost, all believers, there's no exception, all believers who have embraced Jesus Christ as Savior embrace the new covenant promises.

We are men and women of the new covenant. When our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and wine on the night of the paschal supper recorded in the gospels, he announced, this cup he said is the new covenant in my blood. That was symbolic but he didn't stop there.

They sang a hymn and they went out into the Mount of Olives and he set the machinery in motion that ultimately brought him to Calvary where that which was symbolized in the upper room was actualized on the old rugged cross and the covenant, the new covenant promised by God was there signed and sealed before the public eye by the precious blood of his Son. It is written the age of the new covenant has come in and Pentecost began to prove it. Now the story of the book of Acts is precisely that.

It's the proving to the world that we are living in new covenant days. You say, how that? Well, because in the book of Acts not only weak men are unable to obey God but enemies of God, enemies of his will, enemies of his word, enemies of his people are transformed in their hearts so that they join the people of God and love to obey him. This is a thrilling story, isn't it? Here you find these weak disciples, the weakest of the weak who locked the doors you remember after Jesus had been crucified and they were indeed afraid to go out and if I had been with them I would have been afraid and you would have been afraid so don't, don't let's be too hard on them but we're noting the fact they were afraid.

But something happened on the day of Pentecost, the covenant promises were kept and God put his spirit in their hearts. He sent forth his Holy Spirit, he came to tabernacle within them and lo and behold they're marching into the streets of Jerusalem where their Lord was accused and condemned and died and rose again in the very headquarters of the enemy. This is what they're doing.

See, power has come now. They not only have the desire, they have the ability they're doing what God requires of them. Weakness has given way to power.

But not only that, a thrilling story of the book of the Acts is this not only were weak men made strong but enemies were made friends. The gospel is a way of transforming its enemies and making use of them to the building up of its own kingdom. Think of Saul of Tarsus.

He's the classical, he's not the only one. If you read the story through you'll find many many more but just think of Saul of Tarsus. There he was destroying the church as best he could and he was willing himself to be destroyed in the bargain.

He had authority from the high priests, from the chief priest to do anything necessary to get rid of this sect. Riding his high horse metaphorically and otherwise he was coming near the gate to the city of Damascus. And the blessed Lord Jesus Christ manifested his glory to him.

And the glory of the Lord greater than the glory of the sun at midday says Paul was shining upon him and he was physically blinded. But if he was physically blinded he was spiritually illumined and a new man was born. And the old hatred and the old animosity and the old bigotry died out.

And there came into existence a new man no longer Saul of Tarsus but Paul an apostle. And he began to build the cause that he had been tearing to pieces. And he began to encourage the saints whom he had so discouraged.

Did you see how God deals with things? These are new covenant blessings. What makes a man like this? What transforms men and women like this? Well it is this. God pledged something and this is what he pledged.

I will make a new covenant he says and the new covenant is such that I will write my laws upon your heart. And the things you used to do you'll cease to do them. And you will begin to do the things that I love because my spirit will be in you.

And I will cause you to walk in my statutes. Now that's the believer. In any conversion you and I may profess to have had which has not brought us into possession of the spirit and an experience of desiring to please God even though we may have failed many times because of other things I'm not mentioning this morning.

Unless we have come to this point our experience is short of saving. Now the New Testament has many ways of bringing this out. Many, many, many different ways.

I want to mention one way this morning very briefly. We must assume our New Testament responsibilities. New covenant responsibilities.

Obedience. Whatever God commands us to do. Now some theologians have been very fond of using two terms and I'm going to use them this morning.

I hope I don't confuse you. But they speak of the indicatives and the imperatives of the New Testament. And what is meant is this.

In the New Testament you often come across indicative statements plain statements of fact relating to every Christian man and woman that has ever been and ever will be. They're indicatives. But then following those indicatives if you're careful you will notice in every context certain imperatives.

An imperative is a command. It tells you this is what you've got to do. If you are heir to the indicative then you must obey the imperative.

Now let me illustrate this. In Romans chapter 6 you have a number of illustrations of this but let me just give you one. Let me take up the thread at verse 2 there where Paul says and this of course applies to every Christian.

Now this is the indicative. We died to sin. A Christian is a person who was died to sin in the death of Christ.

In his association with Christ. How can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know don't you know as if you were now wondering whether they were accepting what he had said or don't you know he says that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father we too may live a new life.

Now let's not go into the details of that this morning but the point is this. Paul says by the baptism what a baptism is a symbol of the baptism of the spirit whereby we are incorporated into Christ. We are made one with him and being made one with him we share in his death we share in his resurrection we share even beyond that says Paul to the Ephesians in his ascension and in his reign at the father's right hand and Paul means that too in Romans 8 when he says that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Now that's the affirmation. The indicative. Well so what? Okay wonderful we have a share in the death of Christ a share in his resurrection we share in all the benefits of what he did.

On the basis of that indicative however the apostle announces certain imperatives. Let me read to you. Let me give you another illustration without going into detail.

Verses 12 and 13 in Romans 6. Therefore he says do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of unrighteousness. Have you got the point? By faith we belong to the Lord Jesus and we participate in the merit of his death and resurrection and ascension.

That's an indicative. It's true of everybody. You may not be aware of it young Christian this morning.

You may not be fully aware of all that has happened to you when you become a Christian. There are many people in that condition. They've never yet come to realize what really has happened to me.

Well this is the biblical explanation of it. You're one with Christ. You're a man or a woman in Christ as Paul puts it so often.

But now whether you understand it or not comes the imperative. There are certain things you can't do now but there are certain things you must do. One he says don't let your body be used for your old masters whether self or Satan or anybody else but hand over your body and the members of your body as instruments of God.

These are imperatives. So you look at your body. You look at your hands and your arms and your torso and your legs and your feet and your mouth and your ears and your eyes and you hand over the whole thing to God now.

This is the imperative. All belongs to God now. Now I have no time this morning to enlarge upon that but you find it in many many places in the New Testament.

If you want others well I can give them to you but not now. And what happens then? What happens then? What happens then is quite astonishing to use New Testament language. Heirs of salvation according to God's covenant and sealed by the blood of Christ are possessors of privileges that match their onerous responsibilities and enable them to do what the law of God requires of them.

In Romans 8 3 and 4 Paul says this among other things. I'm only quoting. What the law was powerless to do.

What? Is being done in the lives of those who are heirs of new covenant promises. Because Christ died etc. In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.

Who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the spirit. Or again in Romans 13 verses 8 to 10. He who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.

Do you know what Paul is saying in these statements and in many other places? He's saying this. That when the spirit of God promised as a new covenant benefit comes into our hearts and this deep work of writing the law of God upon the inner nature of a man. When this takes place we not only have the capacity but we are in touch with all the necessary resources to obey God's law.

Obedience to God's law and his known will therefore is an imperative in the New Testament. It is not simply a not mere Pauline stress. You have it in Jesus.

You have it in Peter. You have it in John. You have it everywhere.

You remember our Lord Jesus in the in this passage asking why do you call me Lord? Lord and do not what I say. Do not what I say and do not what I say. I will show you that he is like.

Sorry. I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. So we had the story we read this morning is like a man.

He's like a man. He says building a house who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock and the storm came and of course the storm couldn't touch him because he was built upon a rock but the man who hears everything and doesn't obey. He's like the man who according to Matthew built on sand or according to Luke's imagery built on the superficial earth and doesn't dig deep down to lay a foundation on rock and when the flood comes and the storm arises he flops and flounders and falls.

Jesus says obedience is necessary. John says in his first epistle we know that we have come to know him if we obey his commandments. Nothing less than obedience will prove that we belong to Christ's family.

Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and my sister and my mother. Matthew 12 50. Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven.

Matthew 7 21 to 23. Judas heard everything the others heard. Oh my soul be solemnized by this awesome truth.

Judas Iscariot heard everything the others heard but he was not obedient. We must be obedient. Obedience therefore is implicit in the invitation of the gospel.

How often we miss this but it's true. Obedience is implicit in the call of the gospel. Last Lord's Day morning was it Mr. McLeod was preaching and come unto me all ye that are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

Do you remember what it says immediately after that? Take my yoke upon you. Take my yoke upon you. What does that mean? Be joined to me.

Let me lead you. Become partner with me and I will lead you. I will take you where I want you to go.

I will lead you where I want you to be. I will tell you what I want you to do. I will be the leading partner and you are yoke to me not I to you.

Under the yoke to Christ it's implicit in the invitation of the gospel. Or if you want another one let Paul give us his rendering. Through him says Paul in Romans 1 5. Through him that is through Jesus Christ and for his name's sake we receive grace and apostleship.

To call people from among all the Gentiles to what? To the obedience that comes through faith. Now if you want to understand Paul's evangelism there it is. He was asking people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that they might be saved.

Yes yes but here is I beyond that. Believing in order to the obedience that springs out of faith. If faith really links me to Christ the Savior that faith will bring new life to me.

Eternal life and that eternal life in me is a life that will want to please God. May be very hard. I have to take up my cross daily.

But you don't take up a cross for any other reason than to die on it. This is the way. Finally lest anyone be tempted to think that obedience to God's law is a soul damaging or spiritually cramping experience.

Let me suggest that it is not. Many people and especially psychologists and psychiatrists who are not Christian. Often suggest that the disciplines of the Christian life are cramping your personality.

You cannot really grow up unless you are absolutely free to do anything that any impulse in you requires you to do. And whatever passion you have whatever desire you have express it. And if you don't express it you'll suffer for it down the line.

My friend I've got news for you. The only perfect man that ever lived this world in this world. The only psychologically balanced and mature man I've ever known.

Jesus of Nazareth put himself under the law of God. In youth through young manhood until he was 33 years of age. And he died under the law obediently.

Did it destroy his sanity? Did it disturb him psychologically? Did it curb him from anything that a psychiatrist can make of you or of me? Can my psychiatrist make me a better man a more wholesome man than Jesus was? I'm not speaking against psychiatrists as such. Please don't misunderstand me. That those who assume this particular point of view.

That disobedience to the word of God and obedience to the passions of my fallen nature. All this is expected of us in the 20th century. And it is right in the 20th century.

So you don't need to put your neck under the yoke. You don't need to take up the cross and die to self and sin and satan. Jesus died to himself and he came to his glory via the cross.

Do you call me teacher and Lord? He says and rightly so for that is what I am. Now that I your Lord and teacher have washed your feet. You also should do as I have done to you.

I tell you the truth. No servant is greater than his master. Nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them. And Paul agrees. Your attitude he tells the Philippians should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Well what was the attitude of Christ Jesus? Who being in the very nature of God. Did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But made himself nothing.

Taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself and wait for it. And became obedient unto death even death on a cross.

Obedience to the word and the will of God will not make a fool of you. It will not hamper your growth or your development. On the contrary it is the wicked gate that leads to life everlasting.

However narrow it be at the opening. It opens out into all the vistas of eternity. And this is the only life that doesn't get cramped at the end.

And is better at its end than its beginning. Brothers and sisters we have a wonderful savior. Treasure him.

We have a wonderful gospel proclaim it. Use your time. Employ your talents.

Give your treasures. There is one thing that I have no qualms about. And that is asking the saints of God to give their money for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But we need to put ourselves into it as well. For our gospel makes it possible not only for the disobedient to become obedient. And to overcome their weakness in order to become obedient.

But also he transforms enemies. Into the way of his will. This is the new covenant.

These are its blessings. May God grant us as pastor and people. And all of us worshipping here this morning.

A new understanding of what he expects of us. And of the provisions he has made for us. That we may be able to do what he bids.

And honor and glorify his name. Let us pray. Oh Lord hear us as we confess our often confusion.

In the reading of your word and particularly in implementing your commands. How often we have made our impotence the excuse for disobedience. And sometimes our ignorance as a valid reason for living as we ought not to live.

And failing to do your bidding. Spirit of the living God. Fall upon us afresh.

Make your image clear upon our hearts and your spirit felt within our spirits. Work in us both to will and to do of your own good pleasure. Be our God, our Savior, our life this week.

May we sense eternal life in our souls. Cutting against the stream of things. Generating and quickening holy desires in unholy environments.

And enabling us to be more than conquerors through him who loved us. Oh God hear our cry through your all-worthy Son, our Savior. Amen.

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