

Obedience – A Crucial Christ-like Characteristic

Hello again from Hong Kong! Today, I want to complete the theme of the last few weeks which has been concerned with our journey to become more Christ-like; in other words, to develop Christian character. Now, last week I shared on the importance of faith and this week I want to focus upon obedience, which as this title suggests, is a crucial Christ-like characteristic.

In this world, obedience seems to be a little-used word which has little respect. The reason for this is that obedience implies accountable standards of behaviour and actions, but today's world seems to focus more on standards which are flexible. In effect, from a spiritual standpoint, the standards generally applied in this world are less the standards of God and more the standards of His enemy. However, flexible standards are not what Christ desires for those who embark on a journey to become more like Him, and, for the Creator of the Universe, who is the ultimate standard, one central characteristic to becoming more Christ-like is obedience.

When Jesus walked on Earth in human form, he demonstrated this obedience to His Heavenly Father time and time again. As the website 'answersingenesis' states:

"Jesus honors the authority of His Father through complete obedience. A very clear but seldom pondered truth of the New Testament is that Christ's entire life and ministry were orchestrated by His Father and that Jesus was careful to carry out every detail according to the will of His Father."¹

There are many verses in the Bible confirming Jesus' obedience. So, for example, Hebrews 10 verse 7 (NIV) attributes these words to Jesus: *Here I am - it is written about me in the scroll - I have come to do your will, my God.* Similarly, John 14 verse 31 (NIV) records the following statement made by Jesus: *I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.* The ultimate in obedience demonstrated by Christ himself is in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now, this was shortly before Jesus was to be crucified and the reality of the full force of His sacrifice was weighing heavily on His heart. The relevant passage is in Luke 29 verses 39 to 42 (NIV) as follows: *Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.* Notice that for Jesus that no matter how tough the route might have been for Him, obedience to His Father took priority. Therefore, Jesus himself is the model of obedience for us.

¹ <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v3/n1/christ-obedience>

The wonderful truth about being a Christ follower is that Jesus is the ultimate in walking the talk. He has already travelled the route that he encourages us to travel and has experienced all the challenges that we face in this world. Hebrews 4 verses 14 to 16 (NIV) conveys this fact very well: *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus could have chosen to take the easy way out, to go with His feelings, but He chose obedience to God over His own desire not to have to face what He knew was to come. Although we may never have to face the type of challenge that Jesus was facing at the time, the principle was established; namely, that for Christ followers, it's not about feelings, likes or dislikes, it's all about obedience to the Word and to the prompting of the Spirit despite personal feelings.

Are We Called Directly to Be Obedient?

So far, we have discussed the need for Christ followers to be obedient by association; in other words, because Jesus was obedient and He is our ultimate model, by implication, we must be obedient too. Now, this is a solid argument and can stand alone as a clear reason why we should be obedient to the will of God just as Jesus was. However, we also need to be aware that Christ followers, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are called directly to be obedient.

For example, Jesus speaking in John 14 verse 15 (NIV) says to his disciples: *If you love me, keep my commands.*

In Luke 6 verses 46 to 49 (NIV) Jesus clearly conveys the need to be obedient in the following words: *Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but it could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.*

In Matthew 7 verse 21 (NIV) again we have Jesus' own words: *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

This small selection of passages and verses from the Bible make it crystal clear that not only are Christ followers to be obedient by virtue of following the example of Christ's

obedience but they are called directly to be obedient to the will of God by Jesus Christ himself. The Christ-likeness journey is a journey of becoming progressively more obedient to the will of God.

So, we might ask, obedient to what, and the answer is, the will of God. Jesus demonstrated in his life, and death on the cross, total obedience to the will of God. At this point we need to remember just what the will of God is, and it's tempting to make reference to the Ten Commandments here as Jesus confirmed the validity of these commandments in his dialogue with the rich young man recorded in Matthew 19 verses 16 to 19 (NIV) and this is what was said: *Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?' 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.' 'Which ones?' he inquired. Jesus replied, 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.'*

However, to live in God's will is more than this. Jesus summarized the whole essence of these commandments in the interchange he had with one of the teachers of the law. Luke 10 verses 25 to 28 recounts this conversation: *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and, Love your neighbor as yourself.' 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.'*

This passage reinforces that the will of God for the Christ follower, the objective of our obedience, comes down to giving God our total love and allegiance. That means loving God with every fibre of our being and also loving our fellow human beings, including the unlovable. In practical terms, God should be our number one priority and nothing should take precedence over Him, and one sure fire way of showing love to our fellow man, even the unlovable, is by sharing our faith with those who don't know Jesus Christ, at every opportunity we get to do so.

Now we need to know that, at times, we will stumble, and in the context of today's message, this means that sometimes we will fail to be obedient. This is because we are on a journey to becoming more Christ-like. We don't arrive at the destination as soon as we ask Jesus to take control of our lives; we arrive at the destination when we enter the Heavenly Kingdom. Jesus knows we will stumble and fall sometimes, which is why He gave us our personal guide, comforter and friend in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit serves to convict us to repent when we've fallen off the road to Christ-likeness, and then the ever-forgiving Jesus dusts us off and puts us back on the road to Him. The Christ follower needs to know that he or she must never give up despite falls but continue on the Christ-likeness journey.

The Results of Obedience

I want to talk for a few minutes now about what the results of obedience are. When I discussed earlier whether Christ followers are called directly to obedience, I quoted one of Jesus' statements recorded in Matthew 7:21 (NIV) which I'll repeat. Jesus says: *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.* Jesus here is conveying in no uncertain terms, the result of obedience or perhaps, more accurately, the result of disobedience and it's a significant result.

Obedience is a necessary condition for entering heaven. This is an important message that we all need to understand. All too often, Christian messages emphasise the Grace of God, His free gift of salvation and so on but do not give sufficient recognition to the fact that those of us who are Christ followers are called, also, to be obedient. I'm not going to enter into the issue of whether salvation, once given by God, can be taken away because this will be the subject of a future message, but let's agree here that to please God we need to be obedient to His will and obedience is crucial element of Christian character.

Now, there are other references to the results of obedience to God's will that are worth noting too. In speaking to Abraham, God, in Genesis 22 verses 17 to 18 states this: *I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.* Now, we're left in little doubt here by God Himself that those who are obedient will be blessed. We can't know what form that blessing will take in our lives when we choose to be obedient, but when we believe God's word, we can be sure that the blessing will take place. Jesus reinforces this promise in Luke 11 verse 28 (NIV) in the following words: *Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*

In Joshua 1 verse 8 (NIV), we learn this: *Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.* Now, we don't have the original 'Book of the Law' but we do have the Bible which is our equivalent and it's clear from God's interaction with Joshua that obedience to what is contained in the Bible, which is the Word of God, attracts specific blessings. In John 14 verse 23 (NIV) we read this: *Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'*

Now, of all the blessings that result from obedience to the Lord, I'm sure that for the Christ-follower, this will rank amongst the most significant. Obedience establishes the direct and personal relationship with Jesus Christ which I believe is so essential as we make our way through this confused world to reach our heavenly goal.

Summary

Now, this concludes the theme of conforming to His likeness; in other words, the journey towards becoming more Christ-like. For the Christ follower, I trust this theme has been of help and encouragement as you walk the path to Christ. To the non-Christian who has not yet embarked on this journey, I strongly urge you to do so. It can be a tough walk at times, but you walk it hand in hand with Jesus Christ Himself and it's a glorious journey. Of course, there are struggles, but there are many lessons along the way, all designed to build Christ-like character. In the specific context of this message, those who have not yet given their lives to Jesus, would do well to note the words of Paul in the book of Romans. In Romans 6 verse 16 (NIV) Paul states this: *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?* In other words, if we are not in obedience to God, we are by default, in obedience to this world, which is the current and temporary domain of Satan where his standards often rule. The consequences of living a life obedient to Satan are horrific and hellish whereas the consequences of living a life in obedience to the Lord God are glorious and Heavenly. Now, if you would like to join the Heavenly journey, please email us and we will help you to find the right path.

So, it just remains for me to say good bye, God Bless and once again, I'll see you next week. Goodbye.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the standards which govern a non-Christian's behaviour and what are the bases of these standards?
2. In the Old Testament, Saul and David both exhibited disobedient behaviour (see, for example, 1 Samuel 15 and 2 Samuel 11) and yet David still remained a man after God's own heart whereas Saul came to a 'sticky end'. Why was this?
3. Adam and Eve had everything going for them and yet fell into disobedience. Read Genesis 3 and draw out some principles of how people can fall into disobedience, and how to avoid becoming disobedient.
4. If salvation is freely given by God's grace, why do we need to be obedient?
5. Can we lose our salvation by being disobedient?