

OBEDIENCE

Imagine if you will, that you work for a company whose president found it necessary to travel out of the country and spend an extended period of time abroad. So he says to you and the other trusted employees, "Look, I'm going to leave. And while I'm gone, I want you to pay close attention to the business. You manage things while I'm away. I will write you regularly. When I do, I will instruct you in what you should do from now until I return from this trip." Everyone agrees. He leaves and stays gone for a couple of years. During that time he writes often, communicating his desires and concerns. Finally he returns. He walks up to the front door of the company and immediately discovers everything is in a mess. Weeds have taken over the flower beds. Windows broken throughout the building. The receptionist is laying down beside her desk sleeping. Loud music is roaring from several offices. People are playing beer pong in the back room. Instead of making a profit, the business has suffered a great loss. Without hesitation he calls everyone together and with a frown asks, "What happened? Didn't you get my letters?"

You say, "Oh, yeah, sure. We got all your letters. We've even bound them in a book. And some of us have memorized them. In fact, we have 'letter study' every Sunday. You know, those were really great letters." I think the president would then ask, "But what did you do about my instructions?" And, no doubt the employees would respond, "Do? Well, nothing. But we read every one!"

Today we are concluding our series Authentic Faith. We have been looking at what are the basic attributes or attitudes of believers. Today I want to talk about obedience. The Apostle John, near the end of his life, wrote these words;

1John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may *know* that you have eternal life.

He wrote the book of 1 John so that believers would *know* whether or not they have authentic faith. That means more than just intellectually. It means a deep understanding. Why is it so important that we know that we are saved? John's heart is that once people KNOW who they are, they can then GROW to become who God has called them to be and SHOW Jesus to everyone they meet. It starts with knowing. So how do you know if you are a Christian, if you have eternal life? You obey what God says.

1John 2:3-6 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. 4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

How do you know if you have authentic faith? How can you be assured that you are part of the family of God and going to heaven. Simple. Do you obey what God tells you to do?

In this series we have talked about lordship. We have talked about the need for repentance and bearing fruit. We have talked about love and giving and witnessing. It all starts with obedience. This is the most basic tenant of the Christian faith. Jesus said;

John 14:15 If you love me, you will obey what I command.

I have spoken with so many people over the years who were insecure in their faith. They were wondering if they were even believers. For me, it always boils down to the same thing. Do you love Jesus and are you doing what He told you? Love and obedience always go together.

I want to say 3 things about obedience this morning;

1. Obedience is a Sign of Conversion

The verse we read this morning starts by simply saying;

1 John 2:3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

Notice the word IF. The first half of the sentence is conditional on the second half. You know this IF you do that. Jesus said IF you are this, you do that. Obedience is a sign of conversion. You can also say that it is arguably THE sign of conversion, because it is measurable. The verse continues;

1 John 2:4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

These are sobering words. Jesus says that if you wilfully disobey what I have told you to do then you cannot say you know Him. In the series on Proverbs we did a few months ago, I said that it is your direction, not your intention, that determines your destination. It is what you DO, not what you feel or think, that really matters. You can say that you love Jesus, you can sing songs and read books and pray, but are you willing to do what Jesus tells you to do. Especially if it is something that you do not want to do. It is all about whether Jesus is Lord of your life or not. The bible tells us that we cannot serve two masters. How do you know who your master is? Your master is the person or precept you follow and obey.

As we have mentioned several times, Patrick and I have been part of an online mentoring with pastors from across Canada. One of the things that we learned early on in this mentoring is a simple little devotional tool called SMORP. It stands for;

Scripture – reading God’s word on a regular and intentional basis

Message – anything the God may be saying through His word

Obedience – means obeying completely and immediately anything God tells you to do

Repentance – dealing with any sin the Holy Spirit brings to light

Prayer – spending time with God in prayer

This is just a simple little tool, but it is so powerful. You see that at the heart of it is obedience. During my first year in seminary I was wrestling with what to do with my life. I had just graduated from University and really had no idea of where I was going. My first semester I read a book entitled "Run with the Horses" by Eugene Peterson. The title comes from the book of Jeremiah;

Jer 12:5 If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?

I was struggling not with the fact that I did not know what God wanted me to do, I was struggling with doing it. I remember a story that he told in that book about a family of birds teaching their young to fly.

Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake. One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch, pushing, pushing, pushing until the end one fell off. Then somewhere between the branch and the water below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. The adult swallow then repeated this tactic again, pushing, pushing, pushing until the next young bird fell off and had its first flight.

The third young swallow was determined not to go. When the parent swallow came pushing, pushing, pushing, the young bird refused to let go. He held on with all his might, even hanging upside down on the branch hoping not to be bullied off. The parent bird was without mercy. He pecked at the claws of the young swallow until it could hold on no longer. It finally let go, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not -- that it would fly, that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do. Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have claws and can grasp a branch securely. But flying is what they were designed to do, and it is not until they fly are they are truly living at their best life – graceful, beautiful and free.

In the same way that God created swallows to fly, so He created us to follow His commands and laws. We are not really free until we do what God has made us to do. Only in obedience are we living at our best; only in obedience will we be graceful, beautiful and free.

2. Obedience is a Sign of Commitment

The verse we read this morning goes on to say;

1 John 2:5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him.

It says that if we obey, that God's love is made complete in us. In some translations it says that the love of God is perfected in us. The word in the Greek is TELEIOO and means accomplished or brought to completion. It is the same word used when Jesus cried out from the cross "It is finished!" In the Message bible it reads;

1John 2:5 (Message) But the one who keeps God's word is the person in whom we see God's mature love...

Obedience is a sign of commitment. It is a sign of maturity. When we obey God, His will is done in our lives and we are transformed. God's love is perfected and completed (accomplished) in a changed life. Here again, we see that love and obedience go hand in hand.

2John 1:6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

That is a life that has been turned around, saved from sin, and secured in Heaven. That is the sign of an authentic believer, a true follower of Christ, and a Christian. In order to obey God you must believe that His word is true.

Back in 1949 Billy Graham was preparing for the Los Angeles Crusade. He had a close friend who had thrown his mind into turmoil, saying that he did not believe that the promises of the bible were true. He had to admit that there were times that he also questioned the bible and had his own doubts. The night before the crusade he went out into a forest. He knelt down and placed his open bible on a tree stump. He prayed this simple prayer,

“Father, I am going to accept this bible as Thy Word, by faith. I am going to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be your inspired Word and will for my life.”

He says that when he got up he sensed the power and presence of God as he had never sensed it before. Not all his questions had been answered, but a major bridge had been crossed. In his heart he knew that a spiritual battle had been fought and won. He would trust, and he would obey.

3. Obedience is a Sign of Conviction

The verse ends saying;

1 John 2:5 ...This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

This is how we know. Look at that word ‘claims.’ It is easy to claim to be a follower of Jesus. It is easy to put on an act, to say that you are a believer. Are you a Christian? Sure, why not. My mom and dad were Christians, so I must be one as well. It does not work that way. Authentic faith is about living like Jesus lived. Doing what Jesus did. Responding to others like He responded. Giving to others as Jesus gave. It is obeying Jesus so much that we begin to look and act like him, so much so that people begin to see that we are different.

Act 11:19-26 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

When the word of God reached Antioch the people received it and were changed. The Lord’s hand was with them. It caused such a stir that people from all around the region began hearing about it. The leaders in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to see what was happening. It says that Barnabas saw “the evidence of the grace of God.” There was evidence. Real transformation. Barnabas was so excited about what he saw that he went and got Paul from nearby Tarsus and brought him there to show him. Interesting that it says that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

Why were they called Christians – which means little Christs? Because the disciples there reminded the people of Jesus. They loved each other, gave to one another and they shared their faith with others. Their obedience was a sign of their faith, their conviction in who Jesus was.

There is an old Scottish song from the 80s that says “But I would walk 500 miles, and I would walk 500 more. Just to be the man who walks a thousand miles to fall down at your door.” It reminds me of the story of the man who was expressing his love for his fiancé. He told her, “I love you more than anything in this world. I would swim the oceans, brave the storms, walk through fire, fight the battles, and climb mountain to get to you. And I’ll see you next Sunday... if it doesn’t rain.”

What kind of conviction is that? What level of commitment? It reminds me of the time when Jesus told His disciples that all of them would fall away because of Him. Peter speaks up;

Luk 22:33-34 But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

Peter was saying that he would do anything for Jesus. He would go to prison and die for Him. But when push came to shove, Peter gave in. He denied even knowing Him.

Luk 22:59-62 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." 60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

That is a powerful picture. You deny Jesus and then you look up only to see him looking straight at you with disappointment in His eyes. It says that Peter went out and wept bitterly because he understood what he had done. Did he love Jesus? I believe he did. Did he have the best of intentions? I believe he wanted to do the right thing. Bottom line, for all his good intentions, he failed to obey.

Mat 21:28-31 What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 29 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did what his father wanted? "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Which son did what his father wanted? The one who obeyed. You can say that you will die for Jesus. You can claim that He is lord of your life. You can tell him that you will do anything He asks you to do. But when all is said and done, will you do it? Will you obey?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is quoted as saying, "One act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons."

God told Saul to go and completely destroy the Amalakites.

1Sa 15:13-14 When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions." 14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

God gave Saul a job to do, and he did it, partially. Partial obedience is disobedience.

1Sa 15:22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Elisabeth Elliot tells the story of when she and her brother Tom were small children. Their mother would let Tom play with paper bags that she had saved as long as he put them away afterwards. One day she walked into the kitchen to find them strewn all over the floor.

Tom was in another room at the piano with his father singing hymns. When their mother called him to the kitchen to tidy up, he protested, "But Mum, I want to sing Jesus loves me this I know." His father, seated next to him, backed up the boys' mother by saying: "Tom, it's no good singing God's praise if you're disobedient. To obey is better than sacrifice."

Does the Lord delight in sacrifices? Does He delight in good intentions? We started with the story of the businessman who went on a trip. Did that man delight in the fact that his employees read his letters and made songs out of them? No. He wanted them to do what he told them to do.

Years ago Dr. Gary Chapman wrote a book entitled the 5 love languages. They are words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time and physical touch. So what is God's love language. It is obedience.

Most of you know the movie Chariots of Fire. It is the story of Eric Liddell. He was a runner in the 1924 Olympic games in Paris. He refused to run in the 100 meter race because it was held on a Sunday. We went on to win a gold and bronze metals in the 200 and 400 meter races. He went to China as a missionary and died in a Japanese prison camp in 1945. He once wrote;

One word stands out from all others as the key to knowing God, to having His peace and assurance in your life, it is obedience. -- Eric Liddell

What is authentic faith? It is obedient faith.

So where are you at today? Is your faith an authentic faith? Have you made Jesus Lord of your life? Is your life marked by humility and repentance? Are you bearing spiritual fruit? Are you loving others, and does that love flow out in giving and witnessing? Is there an area of your life where you are not being obedient?