

The Obedience of Faith

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to a revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now has been manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.” Romans 16:25-26

Biblical faith is both rooted in and revealed by our obedience to Jesus Christ. This is what the apostle Paul called the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). God has revealed Himself clearly in His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3). Therefore, we demonstrate our faith and please God by believing and obeying His Son. “And without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6).” Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent (John 6:29).” The Bible says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).”

True faith is inseparably linked with our willingness to be submitted to Christ’s authority. This is the lesson of the centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant (see Matthew 8:5-10). As the commander of one hundred Roman soldiers and under authority himself, he understood that Jesus was under God’s authority, which gave Him the ability to heal his servant. When Jesus heard this, He marveled and said, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel (Matthew 8:10).” Just as faith is obedience to Christ, unbelief is disobedience and lawlessness (Hebrews 3:12-19). If we say we have faith but practice lawlessness, how can that faith save us? Faith without obedience is worthless and dead (James 2:14-26). Jesus said, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say (Luke 6:46)?” The Bible says we cannot claim to know Christ and live lawlessly (1 John 3:4-9). Although Jesus died for the whole world, only those who obey Him will be saved (Hebrews 5:9).

True obedience of faith does not produce a man-made morality. Even non-Christians can seemingly have “good” morals and “good” works. Professing Christians can practice religious, moral principles and still be lawless in their heart. What is lawlessness? If we habitually do not hear and obey Jesus’ voice, we are lawless and not living under His authority. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice... and they follow Me (John 10:27).” Jesus Himself showed us the obedience of faith by doing nothing on His own initiative unless the Father told Him (John 5:19, 8:28; 12:49). Jesus said you cannot know Him unless you obey Him and only those who know Him will enter His kingdom (Matthew 7:21-23).

How can we possibly live a life of continual obedience to Jesus Christ? As anyone who has honestly tried can testify, we cannot live such a sanctified life in our own ability. If we could live such a devoted life through our own efforts, Jesus did not need to die on the cross for us. But God intended that the high standard of holiness and obedience he commanded in the Old Testament would be “a tutor to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).” Then, to make such daily obedience possible, God included us in Christ’s death on the cross, so that our sinful nature would be crucified, removed and buried forever (Romans 6:3-8). As the apostle Paul testified, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20).” Jesus Christ died in our place and He now wants to live in our place. *If* we believe that our sinful nature is dead and gone, then Christ can begin to live through us. If we do not know our sinful nature has died with Christ on the cross, we will go on living as if we are still enslaved to sin and in charge of our own life. However, a dead man no longer has any control over his life. He has lost the ability to decide what he wants and where he goes. If we do not know that we no longer have a sinful nature, we can try as hard as humanly possible to overcome besetting sins but we will always fail since we can only overcome sin by faith in the truth alone (Romans 7:14-25).

Faith comes from hearing and obeying the word of Christ (John 12:47-48; Romans 10:17). Jesus said, “If you continue in My word... you will know the truth and the truth will set you free... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:32, 36).” God set us free from the power of sin when our sinful nature died with Christ on the cross (Romans 6:7). This is God’s word of freedom to us but if we do not believe it and act on it, we will never experience its transforming power. Many Christians mistakenly think they are still wretched and held captive by a sinful nature (Romans 7:18-24). The Word of God is divinely powerful but it can only effectively work in you if you believe it (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Bible says of those who do not believe: “The word they heard did not profit them because it was not united by faith in those who heard (Hebrews 4:2).” How can Jesus Christ live through us if we do not believe and act on the truth that His death freed us from sin’s power?

“The righteous shall live by faith” means we believe and live based on what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross: we believe Christ died for us; we also believe our sinful nature died with Christ so He might live through us. This is the foundation of enduring faith that results in our salvation and sanctification (Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 3:14). “For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay. But My righteous one will live by faith; and if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10:37-39).” Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth (Luke 18:8)?” When Christ returns, will He find us living in obedience under His authority by acting on the truth of His cross?

“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 7:21-23

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