THE TEST OF OBEDIENCE

A pastor was preparing for a wedding. During the wedding rehearsal the pastor ran through the wedding vows which included the promise to 'love, honor and obey'. After the rehearsal the groom pulled the pastor aside and said he didn't mind the part about loving and honoring his wife but didn't like that word OBEY. He made the pastor an offer. He said "I'll give you $100 if you'll change the wedding vows and just leave that last part out." He gave him the $100 bill and walked away. The day of the wedding the bride and groom were in front and it came to the part in the ceremony where the vows are exchanged. When it came time for the groom's vows, the pastor looked at the young man and said "Will you promise to bow down before her, obey her every command and wish, serve her breakfast in bed every morning of your life and swear eternally before God and your lovely wife that you will not ever even look at another woman, as long as you both shall live?" The groom gulped and looked around, and said in a tiny voice, "Yes." Then He leaned in and asked "what happened, I thought we had a deal." The pastor slipped him back his 100 dollars and said "your wife made me a better offer".

Like that groom most of us do not like the word OBEY. We associate obedience as being something unpleasant – having to do something that we really do not want to do. However, obedience is a vital part of the Christian life and the secret to real lasting joy.

Psalm 119:1 Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. 2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. 3 They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. 4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.

1. Obey God IMMEDIATELY

When God tells you to do something – do it NOW! You don't delay. You don't wait. You don't procrastinate. You don't put it off. You don't make excuses. You don't drag your feet. You just do it immediately.

Sometimes we fail to act quickly in situations because we want more information first. However, you don't have to totally understand something in order to benefit from it. I don't understand how heavy planes fly in the air but I fly all the time. I don't understand how computers work but I sure like e-mail. I don't totally understand the internal combustion engine but I have been driving a car for years. You don't have to understand something to enjoy it, to benefit from it. And you don't have to understand God's commands in order to obey them and benefit from them.

Every parent knows that sometimes when you tell a kid to do something they will say, "Why". You usually end up saying something like, "Because I said so." Behind those five words you are actually saying, "Because you are not old enough to understand it now but one day you will so in the meantime I want you to trust me. I know better than you. I'm doing this for your own good so you do it." This is what you mean by saying, "Because I say so."

Sometimes God tells you to do something and you say, "Why?" and He says, "Because I say so". God knows more than you. He does not owe you an explanation. One day you're going to understand. For now, just do it.

A couple went on an African safari. They learned a lesson about following the instructions of the guide. One day the guide took them out to find an elephant herd. But he made them promise in advance to obey his rules before they even went out. He gave them some very specific rules. He said, "First, if I say 'Run!' you run! Don't pause. Don't stop. Don't take a picture. Don't think you can hide or drop to your knees. You run! That's law number one.

Number two, when you run, when I say run, you follow me, the guide, exactly. Put your feet in my footprints. Follow me step by step. Don't try to forge your own trial. Because in a panic, you will either get lost in the jungle or you will step on something you wish you hadn't stepped on. You run when I say run and you follow my steps exactly." Sure enough they came upon an elephant herd and it stampeded. The guide said, "Run!" and some of the people froze in their tracks from fear, panic. The guide said again, "Run!" The husband said at that moment that, in spite of his fear he had to move forward. If he had not obeyed he would have been trampled. If he had not followed exactly in the footsteps of the guide he might have gotten lost. He had to obey immediately before he even understood the situation.

In the Bible there are times when God says run and he means NOW. Lot's wife was warned not to hesitate and she was destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.

When God gives you a command you do it immediately. If I call my kids down for dinner I mean NOW. It does not mean come down when they feel like it or at the next TV commercial.

It is like the story of the mother who shouted up the stairs for her son to come for dinner. No response. So she shouted again. No response. She shouted a third time with anger in her voice and the son came running down the stairs. When asked why he did not respond he said "I didn't hear you the first 2 times". It was not that he did not hear, just that he did not obey.

We play that game sometimes with God. The issue is not whether we hear Him but whether we are willing to obey Him immediately. When we delay obedience, it means we're questioning God. We are questioning if God really does know best for us. If you want the blessings of God in your life then obey Him immediately. When He tells you something to do you follow the instructions. Delayed obedience is disobedience.

2. Obey God COMPLETELY

We need to not only obey God immediately but also completely. You need to not be partially obedient, but totally obedient. You cannot pick and choose which commands you will obey or disobey. It is all or nothing.

There is a show on Animal Planet called Top Dogs. Different dogs compete in events which show things like obedience. In one test the dog is sat down with it's favorite food all around it. The dog has to avoid the food and make it's way to it's master. That is single minded obedience.

God's standard of right and wrong has never changed and it never will. It never has. Lying was wrong in the Ten Commandments and it is still wrong today. Truth doesn't change. You cannot pick and choose which commandments you think still apply to the culture of the day. While the expression of the law changes, the principles remain the same.

The oldest temptation is not lust, it's not lying, it's not gluttony. The oldest temptation is the temptation to doubt God's word.

Gen 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, `You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, `You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The devil still tries to trick us like this today. We try to justify our actions saying "I know the Bible says don't do this. But did God really say this ... Is this really true for me? Does this really apply to my life and my situation?" Don't let Satan mess you up like that.

Part of obeying God completely is not only doing WHAT God says but doing it IN THE WAY God wants you to do it.

Imagine my wife says that she want to move a couch from upstairs to downstairs. She asks me to wait until a friend can come over to help me move it. However, I think I can do this on my own and I don't want to wait. So I drag the couch across the floor and start pushing it down the stairs by myself. In the process I end up tearing the couch and scratching up the wall on the way downstairs. When she sees what I have done she will not compliment me on getting the job done – she will ask why I didn't do it the right way and wait for the help.

True obedience is not only doing what someone wants but also doing it in the way they want. It is trusting them to know what is best for you. Obedience is not only a destination, it is part of the journey.

3. Obey God JOYFULLY

Most people do not associate obedience with joy. However, that is the message Jesus gave.

Matt 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

1 John 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.

Why is it enjoyable to do what God tells you to do? Let me give you a couple of reasons:

First, obeying God means you will have fewer problems because you will avoid the snares of the wicked. God created you and knows you. If you follow His instruction manual for your life than you will have fewer problems. E.g. following the directions putting together the doll house – sometimes it is easier to start from scratch than to fix a problem.

Ps 119:110 The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts. 111 Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.

Second, obedience opens up the storehouses of God's plan and purposes for our lives. God's promises are a heritage which means an inheritance. Obedience opens the door to receiving this inheritance and leads us to greater impact in life. The times in my life where God has tested my obedience have always been the times I have seen my ministry multiplied.

Obedience is the key that unlocks the door to every profound spiritual experience. -- Dorothy Kerin

Third, obedience is one of the ways we communicate our love. It is ultimately a form of worship. When we obey God we move into a deeper level of fellowship with him. In marriage, the longer you live together, the more you know what offends and grieves your partner – your husband or wife. You don't know that when you first get married but the longer you're married the more you figure out what will offend that person. But if you love that person, the longer you're married the less you do those things because you don't want to offend them.

When you walk with the Lord through many years the more you realize what God has done for you, how good He's been to you, the less you want to offend God. You enjoy doing the right thing. You enjoy keeping His commands. You do it because you love God.

If you Google search for images of OBEDIENCE all you get is dog training. The philosophy for dog obedience training has changed quite a bit in the last few decades. It used to be that many dog obedience schools operated by teaching the dog, "you better obey me, because I'm your master. And if you don't obey me, bad things will happen." And plenty of dogs were trained this way, and trained well. They obeyed, but they obeyed out of fear. But now there has been a shift in the thinking of many trainers, though some still do it the old way. If the old way was punishing disobedience, the new way could be characterized as rewarding obedience. In this new way of training, you don't strike the dog, you don't yell at him any more than a firm "no!" But whenever you catch him doing something good, he gets praise and rewards. The thinking here is that the dog is going to want to do the things that make you happy, because positive things happen to him when you are happy. Both obedience philosophies get results, but they produce very different dogs. The old way produces a dog that is terrified to do the wrong thing. The new way produces a dog that is eager to do the right thing. And these two schools of thought work not just for dogs, but maybe you've seen children raised by these two ways. And this should be nothing new for us, since basically we are talking about the difference between Law motivation and Gospel motivation. Sometimes, God uses the Law to motivate. But he would much rather use the Gospel to get his people to obey.

You may be asking "what about freedom". We as a society value freedom above all things. We don't want anyone telling us what to do.

I was not born to be free. I was born to adore and to obey. — C. S. Lewis

Freedom does not mean the absence of constraints or moral absolutes. Suppose a skydiver at 10,000 feet says, "I'm not using a parachute this time. I want freedom!" The skydiver is constrained by a greater law--the law of gravity. When he chooses the "constraint" of the parachute, he is free to enjoy the exhilaration. God's laws act the same way: they restrain, but they are absolutely necessary to enjoy the exhilaration of real freedom. -- Colin Campbell

4. Obey God CONTINUALLY

Ps 119:112 My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.

Life is not a 50-yard dash, it is a marathon. Have you made the decision to obey God until the very end. How many can testify that the blessings in my life have been beyond my wildest dreams. That makes us determined to obey God for the rest of my life.

Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God; and he that trusts God, obeys God. -- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

1 John 2:3 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.

When Abraham was told to go he went. It says that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. What that really means is that Abraham trusted God and that his trust was demonstrated by what he did – he obeyed.

Rom 2:13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Trust that God has your best interests in mind and be willing to do what he asks of you, even if you don't understand why. Obedience starts with having a heart that says yes to God. -- Stormie Omartian

Nearly 200 years ago there were two Scottish brothers named John and David. John had set his mind on making money and becoming wealthy, and he did. But under his name in an old edition of the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" John Livingstone is listed simply as "the brother of David Livingstone." And who was David Livingstone? While John dedicated himself to making money, David surrendering himself to Christ, and said, "I will place no value on anything I have or possess unless it is in relationship to the Kingdom of God." On his 59th birthday David Livingstone wrote, "My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All; I again dedicate my whole self to Thee." The inscription over his burial place in Westminster Abbey reads, "For thirty years his life was spent in an unwearied effort to evangelize."