

Lesson 12 - Obedience, Love & Duty to Christ

Our subject begins with a simple text, **Ephesians 5:10, "Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord."** Another translation puts it this way. "Always be trying to find out what best pleases the Lord." Now that's what a real Christian ought to do! For duty to God without love and desiring to please Him, makes life and Christianity nothing but a burden.

It's a divine principle that in love, and human relations, it's the "little" things that really count. A wife usually isn't really impressed with a lot of big gifts. Try giving her a little bottle of Estee Lauder's private perfume collection and she will be incredibly happy. She knows that's just for *her!* Now, some people say, "I don't kill, steal, commit adultery," et cetera, but when it comes to a *little sin*, they feel it is unimportant. Friends, little things count, especially to God.

In **1 John 3:18**, God begins to open our eyes to the fact that it takes more than talk to be a true Christian. **"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth."** God wants to impress us that He is a God of perfection and order, and is, therefore, a particular God. He does not speak to hear Himself speak. He means what He says! Christians today need to realize that.

The devil is a deceiver, and today he has dismissed the feeling of personal responsibility in our religious world. He has suggested, "God is not particular" or "God won't punish you for such a little thing. ..." It's the same lie he told Eve in the beginning. Eve didn't kill, steal, or lie. She did just a very *little thing* - she ate a piece of fruit God said not to touch. And because of that *one* little act of disobedience, this world was plunged into years of sin and suffering. God means what He says!

Sometimes people say, "Oh don't take yourself too seriously, no one's perfect." Yet the Bible says, "**Be ye therefore perfect**" 83 times (**Matthew 5:48**). We know we cannot be perfect ourselves. But, we can be made perfect through Christ, and all can be made perfect in love. We will study more on that later.

You have heard people say, "I don't lie, kill or commit adultery ... and you mean to say I would be lost over just this little sin? Often our list of personal virtues is given in order to rationalize our little sins. That's why we need spiritual discernment, because the devil's tool is rationalism. He exalts reason above God's Word, and unless you learn to live by every word that proceeds from God (**Matthew 4:4**) you are in danger!

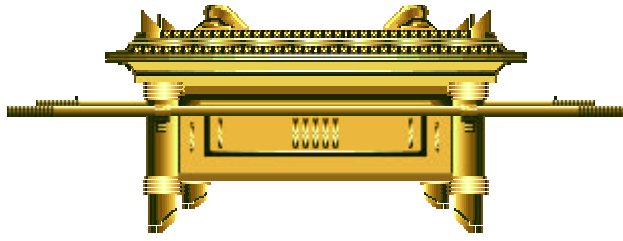
God is particular. He desires loving obedience or nothing at all! God said in **James 2:10**, if we break one commandment we break all (see also **Matthew 5:17-19**). Don't you think God meant it when He said it? You don't have to break all to be lost. Matter of fact, you don't even have to do wrong! All you have to do is *not do right!*

We are often more careful how we serve man than God. We have a job, the boss says be here at 8:00 a.m. and we are there. But for God, we just come in anytime. We're careless and it's because society and Christianity today does not have the concept of the holiness and perfection of God. Let's look and see from Scripture how God wants us to obey Him. We are going to take a moment in this lesson to flip the coin and look at the other side of the character of God. For many lessons we have dwelt on God's love, His mercy, and kindness. As wonderful as these areas are, there is also a great need to recognize God is also the Almighty. He does not accommodate willful disobedience, and sinners will be punished.

Let's look at a few examples of this to impress our minds, and then we will switch back to God's loving side and unite the two - love and duty - in a beautiful relationship.

Our first example comes from 1 Samuel 15. God told Samuel the prophet to tell Saul the King to destroy a wicked tribe of people called the Amalekites. God's command was simple. **Verse 3, "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."** Saul gathered his army, went to battle, and God gave Saul a decisive victory. However, as we continue reading, we find Saul began to rationalize in **verses 7-9, "And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly."**

Saul spared the king and the best sheep and oxen even though God said to destroy all. Now really, this wasn't a big sin. Saul really wasn't even doing anything wrong, he was just not doing what was right! Samuel the prophet went out to reprove him, and notice what Saul said in **verse 13, "And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD."** Saul had rationalized his deed, and convinced himself he was right even though he had done exactly the opposite of what God said! The Bible says there is a way that seems right to a man, but it leads to death (**Proverbs 14:12**). We can't serve God according to opinion, only according to His Word



and law! There are those who live like the devil all week

and put \$20 in the offering plate when they go to church and think they're okay. However, an inflated \$20 cannot pacify the wrath of God when we are willfully disobedient! Samuel answered in **verses 22-23, "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king."** To obey is better!

There's going to be many like Saul in the end! **Matthew 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."** Notice these are not "bad" people, they're doing a lot of good. Just like Saul, they have rationalized their deeds and while not doing wrong, they also did not *do* the will of the Father, and being deceived, they are lost. Let's not fall into this same deception!

Here's another example in Numbers 4. God told the Israelites to build the ark of the covenant. God said don't touch it lest ye die. **Verse 15, "And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to**

bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation." The ark was a sacred piece of furniture. Israel prized it. As the years went by, we find they carried it carefully on long rods so they never touched it. On one occasion, however, a wicked tribe called the Philistines captured Israel and stole the ark. It was heavy, with a solid gold lid, and so they put it on an ox cart and drove it down to their city where they had a feast and mocked God. As time went on we find the ark ends up at a man's house by the name of Abinadab. David is now king of Israel and he decided to get it back. In a joyful parade they began their journey. We find the story in **2 Samuel 6**.

As they went, we find they began to rationalize again. It was a little thing. God had told them carry the ark without touching it. But they had seen the Philistines use an ox cart instead. Why not? It certainly was easier. So they got a "new cart" (that made them feel better) and two men drove it. David and Israel played instruments and had a praise service. But God wasn't impressed. He looked down and could not accept their songs of praise. God had to teach them a lesson on obedience. As they came to a threshing floor, the ox stumbled, the ark teetered, and Uzzah grabbed hold of it to steady it. The moment he did, God struck him *dead*. **Verses 3-7, "And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to**

Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." They were going according to their way, their opinion of what was right, and God dealt with it. How often we are the same. We say, "I understand what God says - BUT."

You see, there will be two kinds of people when Jesus comes. He calls them sheep and goats. Goats "butt," sheep follow. Jesus says, **"My sheep hear my voice and ... follow," John 10:27.** That's the kind of people Jesus wants. Those who follow Christ do so not out of fear, but out of love. **First John 4:18** says, **"Perfect love casteth out fear."** Let's go back to the side of love now. Love is used three primary ways in the Bible.

1. Love is **DISCIPLINE**. We reprove, correct, spank, et cetera, if we love.
2. Love is **FEELING**. We experience joy, passion and ecstasy in love.
3. Love is a **DECISION**. Here is where true love is tested. This love is a *choice*, based on *principle* regardless of personal feeling.

Such love is demonstrated by a mother who gets up three times a night to feed and care for her baby, or a father who changes the baby's diapers. They don't feel like doing it, but they know it's right and they choose to do so. Many times in human relationships we don't feel like doing what's right, but we make a choice and do it simply because we know it's what pleases the person we love. With Christ it's the same. A man who has been committing adultery doesn't *feel* like quitting. But when he knows God says, "Thou shalt

not commit adultery" he chooses to please Jesus and stops his sin. That's a *real* test of love! A family that has been breaking the Sabbath day may not *feel* like keeping it holy, but knowing it pleases and honors God they choose to keep it. That's real love!

John 14:15. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." The greatest act of love in the universe was this love of decision. In Gethsemene, Jesus did not *want* to go through the agonies of calvary. He didn't *feel* like it, and even prayed that the bitter cup would pass. But then He *made a decision*, and said, "Not my will, but *thy will be done*." That's real love.

It works much like a marriage and wedding. Weddings are always happy! I've seen some lousy marriages, but no lousy weddings! Two people who love each other are smiling and happy!

Let's imagine. Here they stand before the preacher; she might have had five boy friends in the past, he had girlfriends also, and now comes the pledge. "Wilt thou take this woman to be thy wedded wife? Will you honor and cherish her, in sickness or health, prosperity, adversity and forsaking *all* others be true to her only?" He can hardly wait, "I Do!" He will love only her! That's restrictive! And you thought Christianity was restrictive? Try marriage! And yet now that the young bridegroom is married and has to be faithful, you never hear him complain about how hard it is, and how he hates all the laws that bind him in a restricted relationship! Rather he is joyful, fulfilled, happy, and loves to be faithful. His love grows and matures through the years.

So it is with Christianity. While there are laws and restrictions, they become a delight in a love relationship with Christ. Such love fulfills the law. **Rom 13:9-10, "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery,**

Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Yes, God is particular, and today He wants us to worship Him not only in Spirit but also in truth! To be obedient from a heart of love and respect! **Romans 6:16, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"** We are the servant of whom we obey. If we obey him, or the Beast, we become his servants. If we obey the Bible and God, we become His. Whose side today are we servants of - God or man? If we want eternal salvation, we must obey. **Hebrews 5:9, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."**

God invites you today to serve Him, out of a heart of love. I invite you to make that decision to obey Him, that He will not only be Savior, but *Lord* of your life.