

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 43

Obedience – Outgrowth Of Our Love For Jesus

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What is our motive for obeying God? Do we obey God because we think of Him as a stern taskmaster; therefore we must obey Him to stay in His good favor? Heaven forbid if we should cross Him! Fear of punishment is one motive.

Perhaps we obey God because we want something from Him. If we can get Him to notice our righteous efforts, surely He would be willing to pull some strings to satisfy a want, or a desire of ours. Selfish demands on God are another motive.

Or, do we obey God for the simple reason that we *love Him*. What a novel idea! What does loving Him have to do with our obedience? We can find the answer to this question by going to the scriptures to listen in on the counsel of Jesus.

Prior to His approaching death and resurrection, Jesus drew His small band of disciples aside to have a heart to heart talk with them. With loving compassion, He spoke words that day that have resonated through time with eternal truth. What Jesus said to His beloved disciples about *love* and *obedience*, can be directly applied to His beloved disciples today! Because His words are His will for us, we can stake our lives on them.

John 14:19-24 (NIV) – *“Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”* Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, *“But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”* Jesus replied, *“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”*

The question Judas, the son of James, asked, triggered a most interesting answer from Jesus; one we don't typically consider. When Judas asked, *“Why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”* Jesus replied,

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.”

To Jesus, *love* and *obedience* are two sides of the same coin – two sides of the same reality. Love and obedience go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. Though Jesus loves the whole world, giving His life to save the world from sin; it was to those who *loved Him in return* that Jesus appeared when He rose from the dead. He did not appear to the Scribes and the Pharisees. Nor did He appear to the hostile Jews. And why should He? Why would He manifest Himself to those who rejected His love; to those who wanted nothing to do with His teaching? Jesus shared with Judas the sobering truth, *“He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.”*

If we dig deeper into the message Jesus wanted to get across to Judas, we discover it is the same message He wants to get across to us. In essence, what Jesus was saying is this;

I'm not looking for blind obedience or a mere outward compliance [conformity] to my teachings. Anyone can make an outward show of obedience, at least for a period of time. What I am looking for, and what I desire, is the kind of obedience that grows naturally out of my people's deep and abiding love for me. My Father and I can make our home with none other.

Because love is of God, it becomes obvious that the heart, which is hostile toward God, does not carry the seed of God's love. How can it? An unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce God's love. God's love is found only in the heart where

Jesus reigns. For that reason, Jesus and His Father cannot make their home in the heart of the unrepentant.

I John 3:9 (NIV) – *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.*

When we are born of God's love, letting His seed (nature) grow in us, a wonderful thing happens. Our whole nature begins to change with the desire to please God. The more we depend on and respond to His love, the more we grow in our capacity to love as God loves. If our Heavenly Father hadn't initiated His love towards us by sending Jesus, the perfect expression of His love, we wouldn't know how to love Him back. I'm very thankful that He made the first move!

I John 4:19 (KJV) – *We love him, because he first loved us.*

Have you ever noticed how much the Heavenly Father's love for us is all wrapped up in how much we love Jesus? If we love His beloved Son, Jesus, it is a given – He is right there loving us, too! Jesus shared the depth and promise of His Father's love to us when He said, *"He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."*

But wait a minute, this sounds like *conditional love*. Yes it does. But, when we take the time to examine what Jesus is saying here, that is exactly what it is! The depth of love the Father has for His beloved children (joint heirs with Christ) is unsurpassed. It is conditional upon our response of love to Jesus. **(See: I Corinthians 2:9-10)**

That is why Jesus boldly stated; *"I too will love and show myself to him"* **(John 14:21b)**.

Can you see the magnitude of love the Father and Son are ready to pour out on those who respond in obedience to their love? Jesus said,

John 15:9-11 (NIV) – *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this*

so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Overflowing joy comes to those who obey Christ for the right reason. It is not a hardship at all to obey Christ, when our motive is love for Him.

I John 5:3-5 (NIV) – *This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Questions for personal or group study:

1. What does loving Jesus have to do with our obedience to His commands? If we obey God's commands, does that automatically mean we love Him? How significant is our motive for obeying?
2. How did Jesus answer Judas' question, *"Why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"* What sobering truth did Jesus share with Judas?
3. What essential message did Jesus want to get across to Judas, concerning the *kind of obedience* He is looking for in His people?
4. Jesus and His Father cannot make their home in the heart of the unrepentant. Why not?
See: I John 3:9
5. What did our Heavenly Father do to initiate His love toward us? How does this help us to return that love? **See: John 3:16; I John 4:19**
6. How important is it to our Heavenly Father that we love Jesus, His beloved Son? Describe the depth of love the Father has for His beloved children, who respond in love to Jesus.
See: John 14:23; I Corinthians 2:9-10
7. If we obey God's commands and remain in His love, what reward does Jesus promise us?
See: John 15:9-11; John 17:13; Hebrews 12:2