

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 76 – The Call to Obedience

By Sharon K. Griffiee

The call to obedience goes forth – “*Follow Me!*”! Because Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and Anointed Savior of the world, He has absolute authority to call and to require *obedience*.

People spend a great amount of time talking about the importance of having faith, at the neglect of focusing on the equally important and key role of obedience. Stepping out in obedience to the call of Jesus makes faith possible by putting it into action. Why is this important? People claim to *have* faith, but have yet to release it. Faith is only real when it is followed by obedience. Faith without works (or corresponding action) is dead. (James 2:20 – KJV)

James 2:21-22 (NIV) – “*Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.*”

James boldly states that faith and actions must work together. The Apostle Paul as well, teaches in the Book of Romans that obedience involves offering every part of ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. He said,

Romans 6:16 (NLT) – “*Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.*”

Paul wanted his listeners to understand, there is no middle ground between being a slave to sin and a slave to obedience to God.

Jesus clinched it when he said,

Matthew 6:24 (NLT) – “*No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*”

The Pharisees in Jesus’ day focused their attention on building great treasures on earth. The thing is, treasures built here on earth are subject to decay. Moths can destroy fine clothes and metals can be destroyed through rust. Thieves can break in and steal our possessions. Whereas treasures deposited in heaven, brothers and sisters, can never be lost.

It is obvious, Jesus did not come to earth to focus on riches. His focus was on you and me!

Philippians 2:7-8 (NKJV) – “*...but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*”

Jesus was a living example of obedience to God, the Father. He did not ask anyone to do anything that he was not willing to do himself.

Hebrews 5:8-9 (NKJV) – “*...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...*”

The rich young ruler and his test of obedience.

Matthew 19:16-22 (NKJV) – *Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He [Jesus] said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”*

He said to Him, “Which ones?”

Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect,

go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

It is interesting to observe the technique Jesus used in his conversation with the rich young man. When he came up to Jesus, he asked him, “*What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*” His question revealed that he was basing eternal life, not on personal obedience to Jesus, but on adherence to a series of rules in which he would obtain credit for his performance. So, Jesus astutely answered the young man by using what he (the young man) was most familiar with, the Old Testament Law.

Knowing this was his mindset, Jesus said, “*If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.*”

When the young man asked, “*Which ones?*” Jesus deliberately listed the set of commandments that dealt with human relationships.

Matthew 19:18 (NKJV) – *Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

Before Jesus could show him the *way to life*, as found in the Gospel, He needed to impress upon the young man the lofty standards required for keeping the Old Testament Law. Jesus was trying to draw the young man out, to expose his true heart. Jesus wanted him to see the utter futility of seeking eternal life by his own merit. He wanted him to realize, no one was qualified to keep the whole law!

The self-confident, self-righteous young man had closed his mind to the living Word of God. He would not admit to his own sin, but said instead,

Matthew 19:20-22 (NKJV) – “*...All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?*” Jesus said to him, “*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.*” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The young man was shattered! What he wanted was to serve two gods, his wealth and God. Jesus said he had to choose! God does not share his position with anyone or anything. The rich young man went away sorrowful, because he was not willing to give up his great possessions. His refusal to obey and follow Jesus exposed what was truly in his heart, which was evidenced in two ways,

1) He had not kept the whole law, as he had so arrogantly stated, because he was guilty of loving himself and his possessions more than his neighbors and their needs.

2) He lacked genuine faith, because he was not willing to surrender all to follow Christ Jesus.

Consider the sharp contrast of Apostle Paul’s response to *the call to obedience* in his life.

Philippians 3:8-9 (NLT) – *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.*

Questions for Personal or Group Study

- 1 By what authority does Jesus have to call and to require obedience?
- 2 What does it take to make our faith complete?
See: James 2:21-22
- 3 Describe how Jesus accomplished complete obedience to the Father. See: Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 5:8-9
- 4 In dealing with the rich young man’s quest to obtain eternal life, why did Jesus deliberately list the set of commandments that had to do with human relations?
- 5 The rich young ruler stated with much confidence, “I have kept...” Explain the futility of trying to obtain eternal life through our own merit.
- 6 When the rich young man asked Jesus, “*What do I still lack?*” What answer did Jesus give to totally blow his cover of self-righteousness?
Matthew 19:21