

## LESSON 9

# Learning to Obey

## *When Love Writes the Rules.*

Obedience isn't how you earn God's love. It's how you live inside it.

### WATCH BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Scan to watch the Lesson 9 teaching video – a 12-minute companion to this lesson.

### CORE SCRIPTURE

*If you love me, you will keep my commands.*

—John 14:15

## The Word That Makes You Flinch

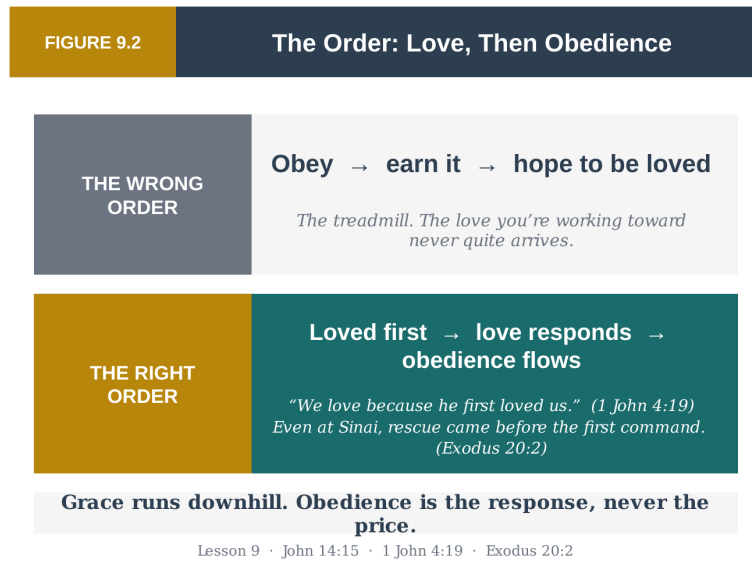
A few months into following Jesus, you've started to notice how much there is to do. There are habits to start and habits to bury, things to take up and things to lay down. And somewhere in the middle of it all, a small, old anxiety wakes up. *Am I doing enough? Am I getting it right?* For many new Christians, "obey" is the word that makes them flinch because it sounds like a test they might fail.

Where does that flinch come from? Most of us learned, long before we ever opened a Bible, that approval is something you earn and can lose. So, when God begins to ask things of us, we read the request through that old lens. Obedience starts to feel like a performance review, with God on the far side of the desk, clipboard in hand, deciding whether we measured up this quarter. If that's the picture, no wonder the word lands so heavily.

But that picture has the whole thing backward. Before Jesus ever asked you to do a single thing, he had already made the decision. He looked at you, mid-mess and unfinished, and called you his own. The obedience he talks about doesn't sit at the front of the relationship as the price of admission. It comes later, downstream, as the natural shape of a life already welcomed in.

*DISCUSSION: When you hear the word "obey," what's the first thing you feel: relief, pressure, resistance, something else? Where do you think that reaction was learned?*

## Notice the Order



Read the lesson's core verse slowly and pay attention to the word order. "If you love me, you will keep my commands" (John 14:15). Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not say, "Keep my commands, and then I will love you." He does not place his affection at the finish line as the reward for good behavior. He puts love first and lets obedience follow, the way a stream follows from a spring.

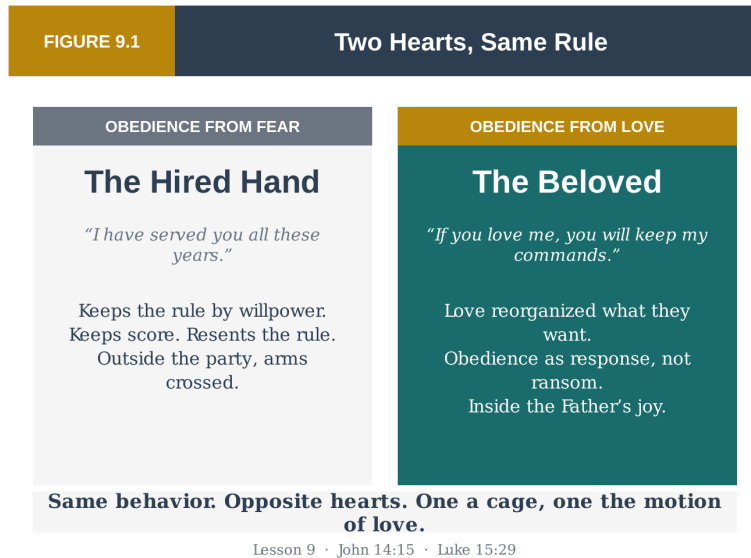
This is the order the whole New Testament keeps. "We love because

he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). First loved us. Everything good in the Christian life flows downhill from that sentence. You are not climbing toward a love you hope to earn; you are responding to a love that already found you. Jesus isn't at a hiring desk, screening applicants for being obedient enough. He's describing, almost matter-of-factly, what tends to happen inside people who truly love him. They start to want what he wants.

That single shift, from earning to answering, changes the entire weather of your obedience. Same God, same commands, completely different sky overhead.

*DISCUSSION: Read John 14:15 again and focus on the order of it. What changes when obedience becomes your response to being loved, rather than your attempt to be loved?*

## Two Ways to Keep the Same Rule



Picture two people, both faithful to their husband or wife for thirty years. From the outside, their behavior is identical. Neither one has strayed. But ask them why, and you find two different worlds. The first stays faithful because the cost of getting caught terrifies him. He keeps a ledger in his head, weighing the risk, holding the line by sheer willpower, secretly resentful of the rule. The second can barely make sense of the question. Stray? From her? The thought hardly competes, because she is in love, and

love has quietly reorganized what she even wants.

Same faithfulness. Opposite hearts. One is obedience as a cage; the other is obedience as the natural motion of love. And here is the point: your obedience to God can be either one. You can keep his commands the first way, bracing yourself, eyeing the exits, doing the right thing while quietly wishing you didn't have to. Plenty of religious people live exactly there, and it slowly wears them down to bitterness or burnout.

Or you can keep the very same commands the way the second person does, not because a rule is pointed at you, but because your heart has been changed by being loved. The behavior may look the same from across the room. Inside, it is the difference between a sentence and a song.

*DISCUSSION: Where in your life right now are you keeping a rule mostly out of fear or duty? What might it look like for that same obedience to come from love instead?*

## Love That Does Something

By now, someone is wondering whether all this talk of love lets us off the hook. *If obedience is just the fruit of love, can't I simply love God in my heart and not worry so much about what I actually do?* Scripture closes that door. "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). Love that never reaches your hands isn't love yet. It's a warm feeling that hasn't grown up. James says a faith that only listens is fooling itself.

So, obedience matters. It matters enormously. Grace doesn't make your choices weightless; it makes them free. The difference is that you're no longer following the word to become acceptable. You're doing it because you already are. John, who recorded that line about love and commands, puts it as plainly as it can be put: "For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden" (1 John 5:3). Not a burden. That's a strange thing to say about commandments, unless love has gotten in and changed how they feel in your hands.

Real obedience, then, isn't a feeling you wait around to have. It's a thing you do, often before the feeling fully arrives. You forgive the person while your pride is still sore. You tell the truth when a lie would be smoother. You show up for the church on the morning you'd rather sleep in. None of it earns you anything. All of it is simply love, learning to use its hands.

*DISCUSSION: Name one specific thing you already know God is asking of you. What would it look like to "do the word" there this week, not to earn anything, but as love using its hands?*

## When Love Writes the Rules

FIGURE 9.3 Fence or Path?	
<p>READ AS A FENCE</p> <p><b>A Fence</b></p> <p><i>"Barbed wire around the fun."</i></p> <p>A God you can't quite trust. Every command feels like a threat. You read "forgive" and hear "or else."</p>	<p>READ AS A PATH</p> <p><b>A Path</b></p> <p><i>"The way home."</i></p> <p>A parent who sees the bum. The contour of the life he's giving. Every command a way to live free.</p>
<p><b>See the face behind it, and the fence becomes a path. "His commands are not a burden."</b></p> <p><small>Lesson 9 · 1 John 5:3 · Exodus 20:2</small></p>	

There's a way of reading God's commands as a fence: a line of barbed wire strung around everything you'd secretly enjoy, put there by Someone who doesn't want you to have any fun. A lot of people carry that picture their whole lives and never quite learn to trust the God behind it. But the fence is the wrong image. When you finally see the face of the One giving the commands, and it's the face of someone who gave himself up for you, the commands stop looking like a fence and start looking like a path.

Think of a parent who tells a small child not to touch the stove. The rule isn't a test of the child's loyalty. The parent isn't hovering nearby, hoping to catch a failure so he can pull his love back. Love wrote that rule. Every do and don't that comes from God is like that, the contour of the life he is trying to give you. He knows where the burns are. He commands the way a good parent commands, and the way a lover asks, because what he wants is you: whole, unharmed, and close.

Obedience isn't how you earn God's love. It's how you live inside it.

*DISCUSSION: Pick one command of God you've struggled to trust. How does it change to imagine that love, not suspicion, is what wrote it?*

So, when love writes the rules, obedience changes from the inside out. It stops being the anxious work of staying in God's good graces, because you were never out of them. It becomes the glad, ordinary, sometimes hard business of living like someone who is loved. You'll still have to choose it, daily, in a hundred small moments. But you choose it now as a son or a daughter, not a suspect. You keep his commands because you love him, and you love him because he loved you first. That's the whole order, and it never runs the other way.

**DON'T FORGET**

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