

LESSON 8

Knowing Christ Through Obedience

John 14:21

The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I also will love him and reveal myself to him.

John 14:21

Class Overview: This lesson explores the close link between knowing Christ and obeying Him. Scripture clearly shows that obedience is not an optional addition to faith, nor a legalistic way to earn God's favor. Instead, obedience naturally flows from love for Christ and demonstrates a real relationship with Him. Using the teachings of Jesus and the writings of John and James, this lesson stresses that knowing Christ is shown not just by confession or knowledge, but by a life committed to faithful obedience.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain why obedience is essential to a genuine relationship with Christ.
2. Distinguish biblical obedience from legalism or rule-keeping.
3. Understand how obedience flows from love and trust in Christ.
4. Recognize the danger of separating belief from practice.
5. Commit to concrete acts of obedience as expressions of knowing Christ.

Introduction

FOR MANY PEOPLE, THE WORD *OBEDIENCE* CARRIES WEIGHT. It can feel cold, rigid, or even threatening, especially if it has been associated with pressure, fear, or rule-keeping in the past. In a culture that prizes independence and self-expression, obedience often sounds like the opposite of freedom. Even within the church, some quietly worry that emphasizing obedience undermines grace.

Jesus never shared that concern.

When Jesus talked about obedience, He didn't present it as a burden on hesitant followers. He described it as the natural response of those who love Him. In His teachings, obedience was never about earning God's favor, proving spiritual worth, or reaching perfection. It was about trust, about relationship, about living in harmony with the One who knows us and loves us most.

This lesson builds naturally on what we have already studied. We have seen that knowing Christ personally matters. We have seen that growing in the Word shapes our thinking and maturity. Now we come to an unavoidable question: *What does that knowledge produce in everyday life?* Scripture's answer is clear: knowing Christ is revealed through obedience to Him. This can feel uncomfortable if obedience is misunderstood. But when obedience is rooted in love rather than fear, it becomes life-giving rather than life-draining. Jesus invites us not merely to admire Him, study Him, or speak about Him, but to follow Him.

We need to reconsider obedience through the lens of relationship. Not as a test to pass, but as a response of love. Not as perfection, but as direction. And not as something that competes with grace, but as something that flows from it. The question before us is not whether obedience matters; Scripture is clear that it does. The deeper question is *why* we obey, and what our obedience reveals about how well we truly know Christ

If obedience truly flows from relationship, then we need to listen carefully to how Jesus Himself describes that relationship. On the night

before the cross, speaking to His closest disciples, Jesus explained what it means to love Him and to know Him in a lasting way. His words remove obedience from the realm of fear or performance and place it firmly within the context of love and trust. As we turn to John 14, listen for how closely Jesus connects obedience with knowing Him personally.

Obedience is the Evidence of Knowing Christ (John 14:21, 23–24)

Jesus speaks with striking clarity about the relationship between love, obedience, and knowing Him. In John 14:21, He says, *the one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me*. Obedience is not a secondary matter or an advanced stage of discipleship; it is the visible evidence of genuine love for Him. This should reshape how we understand obedience. Jesus does not say that obedience earns love, *but that it reveals it*. Love for Christ is not measured primarily by emotion, intention, or verbal confession, but by a life that responds to His teaching. Obedience shows that His words matter, that His authority is trusted, and that His will is taken seriously.

Now see how our Lord reinforces this point in verse 23, where He says that anyone who loves Him will keep His word, and that such a person will experience fellowship with both the Father and the Son. Obedience, then, is relational. It leads to deeper communion with God. Those who walk in obedience do not distance themselves from Christ; they experience His presence more fully.

By contrast, what Jesus says next in verse 24 is equally clear. Those who do not love Him do not keep His words. This is not said harshly, but honestly. Jesus removes the possibility of separating affection from action. To claim love for Christ while consistently disregarding His teaching is a contradiction. Knowing Christ cannot be reduced to admiration or agreement; it involves submission and trust.

See how this teaching challenges a superficial understanding of faith. It is possible to speak warmly about Jesus, admire His example, or even defend His truth, while resisting His authority in daily life. Jesus calls

His followers to something deeper. Knowing Him means letting His words influence decisions, priorities, and actions. So, obedience is not about perfection; *it's about direction*. It doesn't mean never stumbling but consistently turning back to Christ's teachings as the guide for life. When obedience defines a believer's life, it shows that Christ is truly known, trusted, and loved.

Obedience Flows from Love, Not Legalism (1 John 2:3–6)

After hearing Jesus' words in John 14, an important question naturally arises: *What kind of obedience is Jesus calling for?* Scripture is careful to distinguish obedience that flows from relationship from obedience that is driven by fear or self-reliance. The Bible never presents obedience as a means of earning God's favor, but as the response of those who already belong to Him. Consider 1 John 2:3–6. He writes, *this is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands*. Once again, obedience is presented as *evidence of relationship*, not a substitute for it. John does not describe obedience as anxious rule-keeping, but as the natural expression of walking as Jesus walked.

Legalism emphasizes performance and comparison, measuring faith by outward conformity, which often leads to pride or despair. In contrast, gospel obedience is rooted in love and trust, flowing from a heart transformed by grace. The key difference isn't whether commands matter—they do—but *why* they are obeyed. Matthew 11:28–30 helps clarify this distinction. Jesus invites the weary to come to Him and promises rest, describing His yoke as easy and His burden as light. Obedience that springs from a relationship doesn't crush the soul; *it stabilizes it*, providing direction, peace, and freedom because it is guided by the One who knows us and loves us.

Now, this does not mean obedience is effortless. Following Christ often requires sacrifice, self-denial, and perseverance. But obedience grounded in love is sustained by trust rather than fear. We obey not to prove worth, but because Christ is trusted as Lord. Understanding this distinction guards us from two dangers. On one side is legalism,

which turns obedience into a measuring stick. On the other hand, complacency treats obedience as optional. Scripture rejects both. Obedience matters because Christ matters.

Hearing Without Obeying Leads to Self-Deception (James 1:22–25)

In James 1:22, we are commanded to *be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves*. Remember, James is not addressing unbelievers, but people who regularly hear God's Word. The danger he identifies is not ignorance; it is self-deception. Hearing without obedience creates a false sense of security. The Word is encountered but not embraced. The truth is acknowledged but not acted upon. Over time, this produces spiritual stagnation rather than development. The problem is not exposure to Scripture, but resistance to its authority in daily life.

Jesus makes the same point with even sharper clarity in Luke 6:46–49. He asks, *why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say?* This is a piercing question. It exposes the contradiction between verbal confession and lived obedience. Jesus does not deny the importance of hearing His words, but He insists that hearing must lead to action. Next, our Lord illustrates the difference between obedience and mere familiarity by comparing two builders. Both hear His words. Both build houses. The difference is in the foundation. The one who hears and obeys builds on the rock; the one who hears and does not obey builds on sand. The storm reveals what was always true beneath the surface.

We must resist the common modern temptation to equate spiritual activity with spiritual health. It is possible to attend, listen, discuss, and even agree with Scripture while resisting its call to change. Jesus warns that admiration without submission is not discipleship. Obedience, then, is not an optional add-on to faith. It reveals whether Christ's words are truly trusted. Hearing without obedience does not leave a person neutral; it leads to self-deception and instability. Remember, the one who acts on the Word will be *blessed in what he does*. Obedience does not impoverish the Christian; it strengthens and stabilizes life. Knowing Christ is confirmed not by what we hear or say, but by how faithfully we follow.

For Application

Obedience is not a threat to grace; it is the fruit of knowing Christ. Jesus makes it clear that those who love Him will respond to His words, not out of fear or obligation, but out of trust and devotion. Obedience does not earn a relationship with Christ; it reveals that the relationship is real. Hearing the Word, agreeing with it, and even admiring it are not the same as following it. True discipleship moves from listening to living, from confession to commitment. Obedience shows where our trust truly rests.

At the same time, **Scripture reminds us that obedience is not about perfection.** We stumble, grow, and learn. What matters is direction, a heart that returns to Christ's teaching as the guide for life. When obedience flows from love, it becomes a source of stability and blessing rather than fear or pressure. We must trust Christ enough to follow Him. Let His words shape decisions, habits, and priorities. As we obey Christ together, the body grows healthier, faith becomes visible, and Christ is known not only by what we say, but by how we live.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

Memory Verse:

"The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I also will love him and reveal myself to him." — John 14:21 (CSB)

Challenge:

This week, identify one area of life where you know Christ is calling you to obedience, whether in attitude, speech, habit, or relationship. Pray specifically for a heart that trusts Christ enough to follow Him in that area. Take one concrete step of obedience, not to earn God's favor, but as an expression of love for Christ. At the end of the week, reflect on how obedience affected your peace, clarity, and relationship with Him.

For Reflection

1. Why does Jesus connect obedience so closely with love in John 14:21–24?

2. How can we tell the difference between obedience that flows from love and obedience driven by fear or pressure?

3. Why is it possible to hear and agree with God's Word without actually obeying it?

4. What dangers come from separating belief from obedience in the Christian life?

5. What is one specific area where obedience to Christ could deepen your relationship with Him this week?
