

Class Introduction

Stressing the Need for Obedience

In the 90's the FAA tested the strength of airplane windshields by using a gun that launches a dead chicken straight at the plane's windshield at the approximate speed the plane flies. If the windshield doesn't crack from the impact of the flying chicken, then it was thought that it would survive a real collision with a bird in flight. Soon British officials found out about this testing and wanted to conduct something similar with a locomotive they were developing. They borrowed the FAA's chicken gun, loaded the chicken, and fired. The ballistic chicken shattered the windshield, went through the engineer's chair, and smashed the instrument panel behind, imbedding itself into the back wall of the engine cab. The British were stunned. They asked the FAA to conduct their test again and see if everything was done correctly. The FAA reviewed the test thoroughly and had only one recommendation ... "Thaw the chicken."

There is a right way to do things. If we do things the wrong way, no matter the intention, chaos results. The same principle applies to the church and Christian life. We must obey God, submitting to what He says and how He says to do it. What He tells us to do is revealed in Scripture.

This is the foundation of Christian living. Not only does the great commission charge us with preaching and making disciples as we go, Matthew 28.19, it also instructs us to teach others all that Jesus has commanded, 28.20. People must not only believe but obey or submit to God's commands.

- John 8.31: "If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples."
- John 14.15: "If you love me, you will keep my commands."
- 1 John 2.3-6: "This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. The one who says, 'I have come to know him,' and yet doesn't keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked."

If a person claims he loves, believes, and belongs to God, then it will be reflected in the way he obeys God. When we came to Christ for salvation, we made a commitment to obey without equivocating, resisting, or compromise. This of course is obedience from the heart.

Not Legalism

When stressing the need for obedience, we must never allow our emphasis to drift into legalism. The term *legalism* has its origin in the work of Edwin Fisher (d. 1655) known as *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. In it, Fisher used the term to describe "one who bringeth the Law into the case of Justification." While the term is never found in either Testament, the idea certainly is.¹ A simple way to describe

¹ Deasley, A. R. G. "Legalism." Pages 478–79 in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Electronic ed. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.

legalism is having a preoccupation with form at the expense of substance. It works on the outside and drives people to conform *externally*. It holds that salvation depends on total obedience to the letter of the law and often displays itself with an excessive concern for minute details . . . while neglecting the spirit of the law.

Legalism also refers to those who add a list of dos and don'ts to biblical commands. Usually this is done to help prevent a person from violating biblical commands. But soon, these lists take on equal authority with God's commandments . . . and even in some cases supersede them. The effects of legalism often lead to grave fear that forces people to conform externally or be lost.

From the Heart

In Romans 6.17 Paul commends the Roman Christians for the way they came to Christ. He says: *But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over.*

Note how the Romans were motivated out of the heart to obediently respond to the gospel. *From the heart* describes a very personal decision one makes, by his own volition, to surrender to God. But Paul's words go farther. He is not speaking of superficial or coerced obedience, but rather something deeply felt and deeply motivated from deep inside someone.² The Christian reality is a matter of the heart. Paul focused on this in at least two other places in Romans:

- Romans 5.5: This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
- Romans 10.9-10: If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

The issue is not being conformed to what is expected on the outside, the issue is the condition of our heart . . . i.e., doing *God's will from your heart*, Ephesians 6.6. Obedience is a commitment to change from the inside out. It is a long-term commitment, not a short-term fix. It is the lifelong work of forming the kind of convictions, motives, and attitudes that move a person to do the work of God from the heart.

It is seen in the way one respects the word of God:

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart, Hebrews 4.12.

The Word penetrates the heart . . . all the way to our thoughts and intentions. The Word produces conviction. It reveals the source of our thoughts and intentions, unmasking their real condition. It cuts open and reveals the true state. It has the power to cut away what is bad, cleanse our heart, and help us draw near to God with a heartfelt response.

² Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 1–8*. Vol. 38A. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988, p. 343.

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water, Hebrews 10.22

Obedience is the Fruit of Your Relationship with God

Your salvation was an act of obedience. ... *You have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth*, ..., 1 Peter 1.22. You were born again by responding to the truth of the gospel communicated through the Word of God, 1 Peter 1.23. That truth is communicated in Acts 2.38. Repentance and baptism are commands that must be obeyed. When you complied in faith, God saved you because you reached out in utter necessity. There was no way you could save yourself.

Your salvation was not only an act of obedience at the beginning, on the occasion of your baptism, but it was a pledge of continued obedience, recognizing that Jesus is Lord over your life. You made the commitment to follow in obedience. It is the purpose of your salvation. Peter speaks of his own relationship with God as he mentions his being part of the people chosen by the foreknowledge of God through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for the purpose of obedience, sprinkled with the blood of Christ, 1 Peter 1.2. For what was Peter saved? Answer: *To be obedient*.

This point was also made by Paul in Ephesians. You were saved by grace through faith, 2.8, and not by your own work, 2.9. Your re-creation, by God, was for the purpose of *good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do*, 2.10. From before time, God not only chose a people to be in relationship with himself, but he marked out a path for them to walk. This is a path of good works, which characterize their lives and bring glory to Him. Your works are an outgrowth of your salvation. It is your faith that produces the works, and it is out of love that you labor, 1 Thessalonians 1.3. Your obedience doesn't negate God's grace ... it confirms it. It is evidence of God's saving work going on inside your heart. By His grace, and the power of His word, He has given you a heart that wants to obey.

It is true that one will not be saved without an obedient response from the heart. *Faith without works is dead*, James 2.26. A lack of an obedient or compliant heart is evidence of someone who has not committed to God. But as we obey, let us never take credit for salvation. The spirit of *I am doing these things to be saved*, is nothing more than legalism. Your works do nothing to improve your status or position *in Christ*. Again, we refer to Ephesians 2.8-10.

- You have already been saved, 2.8.
- You did not and will not save yourself, 2.9.
- The works you do in Christ are evidence of your having been re-created, 2.10.

All your work in Christ is the fruit of the Spirit, who dwells within you, Galatians 5.22-23. He gets all the glory in your obedience. You are simply a servant obeying the wishes of your Lord.

In This Study

What are some of the things God has called us to do? Things that we must come by way of growth and maturity to observe? While obviously not intended to be exhaustive, the lessons provided cover

principles from both Testaments and go far in helping us understand how to please our God as He rules over our life.

May we come to a better understanding of the need to respect God and His word, seeing the importance of doing life His way. Life just works out better when pay attention to how God wishes for us to comply. Do you have a heart that is ready to obey?

Lesson 1

Love the Lord with All Your Heart

He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command, Matthew 22.37-38.

Introduction

Beginning in Matthew 22.34-36, Jesus is approached by a Pharisee³, *an expert in the law*, who tests him by asking which is the greatest commandment. This is after Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. Now they conspire together on another way to defeat Him. It is the perfect fulfillment of Psalm 2.2:

The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his Anointed One:

The lawyer’s question, *which command in the law is the greatest*, was a common practice by the Jews who made many efforts to summarize the law.

- David summarized the law in 11 commands in Psalm 15.
- Isaiah specified 6 in Isaiah 33.15.
- Micah recited 3 in Micah 6.8.
- Isaiah cites 2 in Isaiah 56.1
- Habakkuk reduced them all to one in Habakkuk 2.4.⁴

Around twenty years before Christ, Rabbi Hillel was approached by a Gentile convert to Judaism who asked him to summarize the whole law while he stood on one leg, (An expression which means to summarize quickly.) Hillel’s answer was a negative version of the *Golden Rule*, “What you hate for yourself, do not to your neighbor. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.”⁵ Both before and after Jesus, rabbis answered this question in different ways. One said Proverbs 3.6 is the heart of the law: *in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths*.

Now, back to our story. Taking Mark’s account in view, this is not a generic question with innocent motives. The lawyer is looking for a way to charge Jesus with blasphemy. The scribes said Moses received 613 commands in the law, with 248 being affirmative and 365 being negative.⁶ Which one of these should have been ranked first, the lawyer wanted to know. Which of the other commands weren’t as important? Jesus provides His answer without hesitation. Some say this is the most straightforward response of all of Jesus’ answers to questions he was asked.

The command Jesus quotes in 22.37 was part of the Shema, which was made up from Deuteronomy 6.4-9; 11.13-21; and Numbers 15.37-41. Every devoted Jew in Jesus’ day would have recited the Shema

³ Mark 12.28 describes this expert in the law as a Scribe.

⁴ *The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark*. The New Daily Study Bible. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, p. 342.

⁵ Barclay, p. 341.

⁶ Augsburger, Myron S., and Lloyd J. Ogilvie. *Matthew*. Vol. 24 of *The Preacher’s Commentary Series*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982, p. 18.

twice each day. Orthodox Jews wrote these passages out and placed them in small boxes (the *mezuzah*) fastened to their doorposts so they would be reminded of it as they went in and out of their house. See Deuteronomy 6.9; 11.20. They also placed them in their phylacteries, small leather boxes they fastened to their foreheads, to always keep the word on their mind. The basis for wearing phylacteries comes from Deuteronomy 6.8. Mezuzahs and Phylacteries are both still used by devout Jews today.

Jesus' Answer: The Combining of Two Commands

The first command Jesus quotes in Matthew 22.37 is Deuteronomy 6.5, one that everyone would have agreed upon. Love God. *This is the greatest and most important command*, 22.38. He then, in 22.39 quotes Leviticus 19.18. Love your neighbor. Then He adds:

All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands, Matthew 22.40.

This verse is especially important as He includes both the Law *and* the Prophets, which was larger than what the Sadducees recognized.⁷ On these two commands hang everything else in the Law and Prophets. God's desire for us is for us to love Him *and* love others. The only way to prove our love for God is by showing love for others.⁸

Love God

The word for *love* in Deuteronomy 6.5 (the passage Jesus quotes from) refers mainly to an act of the will and mind. While emotion may certainly be involved, the most important characteristics of this love are someone's dedication and commitment of choice. *It is a love of action*. It is a love of purpose and self-sacrifice. It is a whole-being response.

Heart, soul, and mind

In Hebrew, *heart* involves the core of one's identity. From the heart spring our thoughts, words, and actions. *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life*, Proverbs 4.23.

We are to love God with all our *soul*. This word can refer to our emotions, see Matthew 26.38. There is an emotional component in our relationship with God and it should be fully employed in our devotion to Him.

We must love God with all our *mind*. This word has to do with our purposes and intentions. We must move our will to get on board with God's plan.

We should also include Mark's addition as he also includes the word *strength*, Mark 12.30. God is calling for the highest form of sacrifice – our entire self. With all our physical capabilities.

From this we learn:

- Our love for God is *intelligent*.

⁷ The Sadducees only recognized the Torah as authoritative.

⁸ Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Third Ed. The New Daily Study Bible. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001, p. 345.

- It has *feeling*.
- It is *willing*.
- It is *servicing*.⁹

Listed Distinctly

Note how loving God with our heart, soul, and mind are not joined together. *They are spread apart*. We are to love God *with all* of our heart, *with all* of our soul, and *with all* of our mind. This is meant to express the greatest amount possible. God is not looking for someone who simply wants to go through the motions or perform a few rituals to check off a list. God's wholehearted love, "must not be answered in a halfhearted manner."¹⁰ His sons and daughters are to be characterized by *whole-being* love for Him. We are to love God with everything we are.

Love and Obedience Go Together

God shows His faithfulness by keeping *his gracious covenant loyalty for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commands*, Deuteronomy 7.9. Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," John 14.15. Paul spoke of our need to have an *undying love* in Ephesians 6.24. An unbeliever is *anyone who does not love the Lord*, 1 Corinthians 16.22.

Even though we fall short by failing to do right at all times, our hearts should always love what is right and long to do what honors God. The one who loves God with all his heart, and soul, and mind is someone who trusts and obeys. This is seen by:

- meditating on God's glory, Psalm 18.1–3.
- trusting in God's divine power, Psalm 31.23.
- Seeking fellowship with God, Psalm 63.1–8.
- Loving God's law, Psalm 119.165.
- Being sensitive to how God feels, Psalm 69.9.
- Loving what God loves, Psalm 119.72, 97, 103.
- Loving whom God loves, 1 John 5.1.
- Hating what God hates, Psalm 97.10.
- Grieving over sin, Matthew 26.75.
- Rejecting the world, 1 John 2.15.
- Longing to be with Christ, 2 Timothy 4.8.
- Obeying God wholeheartedly, John 14.21.¹¹

Love is the true secret in effective obedience to God. A loving heart will not find His commandments to be burdensome, 1 John 5.3. Love will chase away the fear of punishment, 1 John 4.18. Love will take

⁹ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985, Vol. 3, p. 339.

¹⁰ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 809

¹¹ MacArthur, *ibid*, p. 340.

pleasure in following His commands, Romans 7.22; Psalm 119.70 and find sadness when transgressing them, Matthew 5.4. Those who love God from the heart obey in the most effective way.

An Impossible Command?

The absolute love Jesus calls for is beyond our human ability. We love God, not in perfection or in completeness, but totally ... with heart and soul and mind. We will always be reaching forward toward the goal of a more perfect love ... growing and maturing ... but until we shed our human body with its frailties and weaknesses this love will never be all it should be. As we go forward in our spiritual life, let us make the commitment to walk by the Spirit, Galatians 5.16. We also should determine to cooperate fully with the Spirit as He performs the work of transformation in our heart, Galatians 5.22-23. We must never grieve Him (Ephesians 4.30) or stifle His work (1 Thessalonians 5.19).

We grow in love by cooperating with the Spirit. We cooperate by practicing the spiritual disciplines of reading the Word, giving, and serving. What are some things you can do this week to improve on the practice of these things?

The sum of the revealed Word of God is the command to love God and to love Him before all others, more than anything and anyone else.¹²

For Thought and Reflection

1. Why did the lawyer ask Jesus the question in 22.36?
2. What does Jesus mean by “love”? See also John 14.15; 15.13; Philippians 2.3-4.
3. Since the love Jesus’ describes is beyond our ability, what hope do we have to love like this? What can we learn from Paul’s teaching in Galatians 5.14-16; 22-23?

¹² O’Donnell, Douglas Sean. *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*. Edited by R. Kent Hughes. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013, p. 658.

