

Plan to Obey 1 John 5:1-5
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“If you had done what I told you to do, you would not be in trouble.” Many of you have heard those words at some point in your life. I know I have heard and spoken them. “I told you to stop playing catch with the football in the living room. But you kept doing it, and now the lamp is broken.” I recall my mom saying that, more than a few years ago. But, it is not just children who end up in these situations. Adults find obedience difficult as well. Physicians say over half of their patients don’t take their medications as prescribed. They don’t obey the physician’s instructions. There are numerous people who choose to be self-employed primarily because they don’t like taking orders from someone else. Obedience often runs head on into our ego and pride. We think, “Who is he to tell me what to do?” It becomes especially hard to obey when we follow someone’s instructions and find they are wrong or unwise. When you do a job at work exactly as the boss told you to do it, and it ends up being a huge mess, you might begin to wonder, “Why should I listen to anyone. I will just do things my way.”

Now, a real problem develops when we begin to have that attitude toward God. “Who is He to tell me what to do? I will just run my own life and make my own decisions!” Friend, if that is the attitude you have, this sermon might not be exactly what you are hoping to hear. However, I would ask you to listen to what God says to us in His word. As we continue our journey through the book of 1 John, we are going to look at chapter 5:1-5. In this text, we will see what it means to obey God, why it is so important, and how it is possible to do so. Let’s pause and pray that through His word and by His Spirit, the Lord would help us grow in obedience.

What does it mean to obey God? **1 John 5:2, 3** *This is how we know that we love God’s children when we love God and obey His commands. For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands. Now His commands are not a burden. To obey God is to obey, or keep His commands. To do what He has told us to do. So, what has He has told us to do? What are His*

commands? The Bible, which is God’s word, contains hundreds of imperative statements. We are told to “do not do this,” and “do that.” Each of these commands is important. We don’t have the right to choose which we want to obey and which we don’t. Yet, Jesus helps us by summarizing God’s commands in two statements: Love God, love your neighbor. That means obeying God might not be easy, but it is pretty simple. It is about love. Yet, we are not always real sure about what loving God and other people involves. For example, some folks claim that if you love someone, you will often lie to that person to protect his or her feelings. God’s commands make it clear that is not the case.

I think one of the best explanations of what it means to love God and others, is a list of His commands found in Exodus 20 and repeated in Deuteronomy 5, also known as the Ten Commandments. Surveys find that most Americans cannot name more than two of them, so you might want to turn to Exodus 20 for a little review. Yes, these commandments are part of the Old Testament, part of the Mosaic Law, and in one sense are not binding on believers in Jesus, since He has already fulfilled God’s Law in our place. However, they continue, even today, to be a good summary of God’s moral law and reflect how He expects us as Christians, to live. In fact, many folks who are not believers recognize the Ten Commandments as great moral guidelines. Most of our legal statutes are based upon them. Someone said that in the United State we have almost forty million laws trying to enforce just Ten Commandments. I think it only makes sense that they would be posted on the wall of our court rooms and classrooms. However, A few years ago, the ACLU convinced the United States Supreme Court that this must not be allowed. It is, however, ironic that even folks very enthusiastic about posting the Ten Commandments often like to treat them as merely the ten suggestions.

A bigger problem, however, is that many times we misunderstand what the Ten Commandments really mean and what they actually involve. I have heard a statement like

this, “Pastor Dan, I keep the Ten Commandments. It says do not make any graven images, and I don’t have any statues of pagan gods in my living room. It says to not murder or steal, and I have never been arrested for murder or robbery. I am okay.” Yet, Jesus says the Commandments involve much more than that. In Matthew 5, He tells us that adultery is not just sleeping with someone who is not your spouse, but also includes lustful thoughts. Murder is not just sticking a knife in someone’s chest, but includes a hateful attitude toward that individual, or even calling her a fool. Though we might not consider a little white lie as “bearing false witness,” God does. The reality is that most of us are like Martin Luther who said he broke nine of the Ten Commandments, every day, and the other one, keeping the Sabbath Day, he broke just on Sundays.

Folks, the first thing the list of God’s commands should do is make us aware that we are each a sinner, in need of forgiveness. None of us obey God’s Commandments, at least we certainly don’t do so perfectly. That is why Jesus had to die on the cross in our place. That is why we need to stop relying on ourselves, put our trust in Jesus Christ, and receive the forgiveness and salvation only He can provide. Yet, if our salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus alone...as Ephesians 2:8, 9 and other passages in the Bible clearly teach...if we are saved not because of what we do, but because of what Jesus has done for us, why do we need to strive to obey His commands?

Our text gives us three reasons:

Number one, obeying God’s commands is a way to express love for God. **5:3a** *For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands.* This is what Jesus Himself told us in **John 14:15** *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* We show our love for God, for Christ, by obeying the commands He has given. We noted last week that loving God involves more than just following orders. Grudging obedience might be better than disobedience, but it is not really a virtue. If Nancy asks me to take out the garbage, it is probably better that I grit my teeth and grumble as I do that, than it would be if I give Nancy a kiss, say, “I love you,” and then add, “I am not taking out that garbage. I want to watch television. You take it out.” Jesus tells an interesting story in

Matthew 21. A father asks his two sons to go work in the field, pull weeds or something. The first son says, “No dad, I am not doing that.” But he later changes his mind and does. The second son says, “Sure dad, I would be glad to go work in the field,” but he never gets there. Jesus’ point is that God, like a human father, is not pleased with those who say they will obey, but with those who actually do so. Our obedience to God shows that we really do love Him.

Number two, obeying God is important because through it we gain a spiritual victory. **5:4** *Because whatever has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith.* Remember, when John says “world” he does not mean the universe, our planet or the human population. Our fight is not with the other 7.5 billion people on earth. Rather, we are in a spiritual battle against a world structure which refuses to honor God, refuses to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and thus knowingly or unknowingly, is an ally of Satan. John equates obedience with spiritual victory, because when we obey God, it messes up the enemy’s plans. C. S. Lewis pointed out that obedience is really the bottom line. He noted, “Satan’s cause is never more in trouble, than when a Christian believer looks out at a world where every trace of God seems to have disappeared, yet still obeys.” Friends, the devil is very frustrated, when we choose to obey the Lord, even when we don’t “feel like” doing so.

I love the story of the little boy who was furiously riding his trike around the block. The third time he went by, the neighbor lady stopped him and asked what he was doing. “I am running away from home,” he replied. “Well, why do you keep going around the block?” she asked. “Because, my mom said I cannot cross the street!” Friend, if your child obeys you even when he or she is running away from home, you are doing okay as a parent. Friends, there are many things in life over which you and I have little control. We often cannot determine our emotional response to various situations. Yet, we can almost always choose whether or not we are going to obey God. And when we chose to obey, it is a spiritual victory. Resisting temptation might not be a reason to celebrate and have a party, but it is a good reason to express our thanks to God for His grace.

Number three, obedience to God is really a chief purpose of life. It is one of the main reasons we are on this planet. John alludes to this in verse **5:3b** when he says, *Now His commands are not a burden*. There is nothing unnatural about obeying God. That is what we are made for. Elizabeth Elliot, wonderful Christian author who died two years ago, told about watching an English Sheep dog herding sheep. Those are the big dogs that look like they badly need a haircut. As she watched the dog, she noted that not only did he obey his master's commands, but did so with great enthusiasm. The dog seemed to delight in doing what he was told. She thought, I guess that is not surprising. This is exactly what the dog is bred and trained to do. He is meant to obey his master. Friend, likewise you and I are created to obey God. In doing so we find true joy, because His commands are not a burden. We also never need to worry about God making a mistake when He gives a command. Ultimately, we will never regret obeying the Lord. Never.

At this point, some of you may be feeling a little frustrated. You are thinking, "Yes, Pastor Dan, I know it is important to obey God, but it is not easy. How do I do that? I try to obey, but like you said, it seems I break nine of the Ten Commandments every day. How do I start obeying God?" Listen to John's answer. **5:4, 5** *Because whatever has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith. And who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? How do I obey God? By believing in Jesus Christ.* Believing in Jesus means trusting in Him. It means turning away from trusting in myself, and putting faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. In one sense, believing in Jesus is obeying God's most basic command. In verse 10 John says to reject Jesus Christ is to call God a liar. God commands everyone to believe in Jesus. If we do not do this we are flagrantly disobeying God. Even if we would obey all the other commandments, a failure to believe in Jesus Christ, makes us a sinner deserving of God's wrath.

Yet, John's most important point is that anyone who believes in Jesus is able to obey God's other commands. **5:1** *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves*

the one born of Him. Now, that last phrase might seem a little confusing. Some folks think this means to love other Christians, but John probably means loving Jesus, God's Son, the one begotten of the Father. Either way, John's point is clear. One who believes in Jesus has been born of God, born again, regenerated, been, been made alive in Christ. Friends, I think we sometimes miss this most basic teaching of the New Testament. About what it means to be Christian. Yes, being a Christian involves having our sins forgiven. It involves receiving the promise of eternal life. It also, however, includes inward transformation. Everyone who is really a Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. An important part of the Spirit's job is to change us from people who had no desire to obey, into men and women who now want to obey Him. This is what the Old Testament prophets spoke of in their promise of a New Covenant.

Ezekiel 11:19, 20 *I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.* In The Wizard of Oz, the Tin Man wants a new heart because he doesn't think he has one. Yet, throughout the movie he continually demonstrates compassion for others, and at the end the wizard tells Tin Man he doesn't need a new heart, because he has had one all along. However, God tells us that a new heart is exactly what we need. We need a spiritual heart transplant. By nature, our spiritual heart is cold, hard, even dead toward God. We want to do things our way. We don't want to obey Him. However, when we are born of God, born again, we are given a new heart. It is a heart that has a natural desire to please God, it is a heart which will enable us to obey Him.

An analogy which might be somewhat helpful at this point is watching a T-ball baseball game. Folks, even if you really like baseball, it is not much fun watching 5 and 6 year olds play T-ball, unless you have a child or grandchild on the team. Then it is more fun to see little Jimmy make it safely to first base than it is to watch Joe Mauer hit a home run for the Twins. Many of you, especially moms, can testify that you developed a new attitude, a new heart, toward sports as your children begin to participate. That

transformation of attitude, from having no desire to watch a game, to being excited about watching a game, is an analogy to the change of heart God brings about in our lives through the Holy Spirit. At one time, we were people with zero desire to obey God. Yet, now we delight in following His commands. As Christians, it is not torture for us to obey the Lord. Through faith in Jesus Christ, by being born of God, we are able to obey Him.

Friends, the assignment I have for you today is to obey God. Big surprise, right? We must recognize that obedience to the Lord is a lifelong calling. It is a long journey. Yet, every long journey begins with one step. So, what is the first step we need to take? Well, remember the most important command God has given is to believe in Jesus Christ. If you are not doing that, it doesn't really matter how many other commands you are obeying. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you lack the ability to truly obey many of the other commands. So friend, if you are not trusting in the Lord Jesus that is what you need to do now. You need to stop relying on yourself or someone or something else. Whether it be your intelligence, charm, good looks, family background or even your religion. You must stop thinking you can make it fine without Jesus, and instead place your confidence in Him and in what He has accomplished through His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave.

Now, if you are already a Christian, if you are trusting in Jesus, I have a two-part assignment for you. Part one, is to make sure you are looking at obedience to God from the right perspective. The reason we want to obey God should not be because we are trying to impress other people. Nor should we be trying to pay God back for what He has done for us. It is foolish pride which makes us think we can somehow repay the Lord for His grace. Nor should we obey God because we are trying to negotiate with Him. "Okay, Lord if I give up this sinful habit, then I want you to make sure I get this promotion at work." God always expects our obedience, so it is not something we can use to barter with Him or earn His favor. Instead our obedience needs to flow from love. We are to obey God because we love Him. And remember how that love grows. First, we experience God's amazing salvation through faith in Jesus. When we realize what has happened our hearts are naturally filled with

gratitude. And that gratitude, if allowed to permeate our soul, with the Holy Spirit's help, will naturally grow to love. And when we love God, it is natural to obey Him. Oh, that doesn't mean it will always be easy. There will be times, like the Apostle Paul describes in Romans 7, where we find ourselves doing the wrong things we don't want to do and failing to do the right things that we want to do. Yet, slowly but surely, as our love for God grows and our obedience grows.

Part two of the assignment, do it. Obey the Lord. Start by identifying on aspect of your life where you know your actions, attitudes or words have not been pleasing to the Lord. Maybe there are addictions, whether to pornography, food or shopping, which are infecting your soul. Or maybe there are bad attitudes or unloving actions toward another person or persons in your life. Perhaps you have been using money in totally selfish ways. Maybe you are neglecting to take time to read the Bible, pray, get to church regularly. Oh friend, I don't know what bad things you have been doing, or good things you have not been doing, but I suspect you do. Then, I urge you to resolve to make at least one change this week in obedience to God. It probably won't be easy. You will certainly need God's help, so you should pray and ask for that. You may also want the help of another person to encourage you or hold you accountable. So, don't be afraid to ask. Pastor Mark and I get paid for doing things like that, and there are plenty of other folks here who would be glad to help you as well. But, friend, don't just talk about obeying God, don't just think about obedience, by God's grace, do it. You will be glad you did. We close with a wonderful prayer...Oh Great God.