

Living Life God's Way

Number eight in a nine-part series on what we believe

November 7 & 8, 2009

Intro:

This week our church is hosting a get together for pastors in the area. The guy organizing the event asked me to share a book I've been reading and to say a few things about it. Maybe I should try to impress them and hold up this 10-pound reference book on Systematic Theology, claiming that I read it every night before bed.

Instead I think throw a curve ball and show them the books that *really* are on my nightstand (*Some Like it Hot* cookbook, and *Flyfishing for Steelhead*). The fact is; pastors are like other people, with varied interests. We don't have to impress each other with pseudo-spirituality. There's nothing ungodly about having wholesome hobbies.

Cultivating a culinary flair, or an accurate cast can be fun and appropriate if these hobbies are seen for what they are, just pleasant diversions. The main trajectory of every pastor's life, and the direction for us all to pursue, is to know God. Anything else should come in a *distant* second place. There is nothing that compares! This is the ultimate pursuit and puts everything else in perspective.

In this series, we've been learning what God has said about himself and about our life with him. This is theology and our approach has been systematic. That is, we've been addressing one facet of the Christian faith at a time, just like this reference book is organized.

For instance, we've covered what the Bible has to say about Jesus - the chapter on him is labeled *Christology*. We've covered what theologians call *pneumatology*, the study of the Holy Spirit. Last week it was *ecclesiology*, what we believe about the church. Next week we'll wrap up the series with a message on *eschatology* - what the Bible teaches about the end times. But as I planned this series, it

seemed that something significant was missing from the classic list of foundational facets of faith: I'm talking about *how we live*. Is it just fine for us to believe all these points of doctrine but not let them affect our lives at all?

Just maybe, here at Dayspring, we should *actually expect followers of Christ to follow Christ*. I think the world is looking for us to show this kind of continuity and integrity. In fact, they despise our hypocrisy, and so should we.

In this message I want to talk about *one of the least popular words* in our vocabulary, that is *obedience*. First:

1. Doing what God says is not to be considered as optional. It's sad that this has to be said, but it does. I don't know how modern Christians became so casual about obeying God because it is commanded so many times that we could find examples on nearly any page in the Bible. Over and over God says, **Keep my commands ...** (**Prov 7:2**). *Don't reject them, don't neglect them, don't only obey the easy ones, and don't only follow them when convenient.* In **Jer 6:19**, God says, **my people have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.**

God wants to see his children bear his image. Jesus said, **to see me is to see the Father**. And when the world looks at us, they should see Jesus. Our goal is stated in **2 Cor 3:18 - to be transformed into his likeness**. Jesus was *perfectly* obedient. **John 6:38 - I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.** We're to be like that. Unfortunately, many Christians don't take on the family resemblance. Gallup - *religion up, morality down!*

The word "Christian" can mean very little these days. When it was first used in **Acts 11:26**, it meant *like Christ*. The first Christians lived according to his teachings and took on Christ's characteristics. Imagine what it would be like to attend a church where the people are actually Christlike - being like him, *doing* as he did.

James 1:22 - Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Jesus placed the same emphasis on obedience. In Matt. 7:24 he says the person who is stable and secure doesn't only *hear* his words but puts them into practice! And the culmination of Christ's Great Commission to the church is to teach others to obey everything he command (Matt 28:20). We shouldn't market a version of Christianity that is less than true discipleship. If the focus is only on attracting people to our show, then the temptation is to present Jesus as the one who *exists to make everyone happy, healthy, wealthy and wise*. The problem with this is the Bible teaches *we exist for God*, not that *he exists for us*. We must call *followers of Christ to follow Christ*.

This won't be popular. To question our self-indulgent consumerism sounds too demanding, even politically incorrect. *Doing your own thing* is the way of the world. We're pressured to adopt relativistic ideas that reject any antiquated notion of right and wrong. It is counter-cultural to say that *there is a God with authority over us*. But *that is what the Bible teaches so that is what we believe*. The apostles got it. Acts 5:29 - We must obey God! Not optional.

2. Doing what God says leads to reward, but disobedience leads to disaster. *There are two halves:*

One blessing of obedience is **setting a good example**. It's hard to *lead others to follow Christ* if we aren't following closely ourselves. When we stay in sin, we lose confidence in our ability to speak about Christ. We also lose the needed credibility to do so without hypocrisy. But when we follow Christ consistently we can be an influence. Mt 5:16 - Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. People are watching. Our behavior, *whether obedient or disobedient*, sets an example.

Another blessing that comes from obedience is **intimacy with God**. 1 John 2:5 - If anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. 24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. *Abiding!*

Our obedience also provides **assurance of salvation**. 1 John 2:3 - We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. 6 - This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

Doing what God says also gives us **confidence in prayer**. 1 John 3: 21,22 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Obedience leads to a **better life!** Dt 5:29 - Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever! 28:2 - All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God. Ps 119:1,2 - Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.

R - *Doing what God says leads to reward, but disobedience leads to disaster.* **T** - Not only do we want to experience the blessings related to obedience, but we also want to avoid the consequences of disobedience, that is: discipline. Dt 28:15 If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you... 1 Sam 12:15 - If you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you... *This is not what you want.* The stakes are high. Eccl 12:14 - God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

This verse reminds me of something I heard at the

men's breakfast. The speaker described Esau's decision to squander his birthright for some lentil stew. It was just a *bowl of beans!* ABOB. He asked: *what's your ABOB?* For what measly thing are you willing to give away your rightful position in God's family? He wants you to experience the inheritance. What Esau chose was temporary sensual satisfaction. *After the bowl of beans, he got hungry again.*

If we don't want to miss out, we need to do what God says. Follow his instructions! If you're trying to raise kids, why not go to the ultimate Father and learn his parenting principles? If you want to handle your finances, why not read God's rules about money management? If you want to get the most out of your sexuality, why not follow God's design? After all, he knows what is best and wants what is best. He has a vantage point to see it all, an eternal perspective. His warnings are in our best interest and he says that obedience leads to reward, but disobedience leads to disaster.

3. Doing what God says is not a way to earn salvation, but an expression of thanksgiving and an act of worship. *There are two parts of this point as well.*

•First: We don't earn our salvation by being good. Obedience doesn't make us right before God. That is not our motivation. Rom 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known... 22 It comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Summary in 3:28 we are justified by faith apart from observing the law. It's not based on performance.

To be justified means being declared not guilty. All charges are removed from your record, not because of something *you* did, but because of something *God* did. Jesus

took your place. And the benefit of that substitute is offered freely by his grace... Not by works!

? Some verses require explanation. They can be misunderstood to teach that obeying gets you saved. What they mean is that the saved obey. Our behavior doesn't get us saved, but it shows that we are.

But if we are not obeying in order to get saved, why obey? Because we are saved! We are motivated by thanksgiving. We obey not to become children of God, but because we are the children of God. We do what God says not to get to new life, but because we've been given new life. Not as a way to earn salvation, but as an expression of it.

Picture receiving a gift beyond anything you could imagine or deserve. We're overwhelmed with *appreciation*. Obedience is an act of loving worship! John 14:15 - If you love me, you will obey what I command. 1 John 5:3 - This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome. Following through is a way to respond to his love! Rom 2:4 - God's kindness leads you toward repentance. That fact that he has been *merciful* is motivating! Few of us are experiencing the full consequences of our choices. He's giving us time to turn to him. That is what repentance means.

T - The first three of these points present answers to the question *why? Why obey God?* **Sum:** I've said we're to obey God because he commands it, we're to obey God because of the advantages, and we obey God as an act of worship, motivated by appreciation.

This fourth point now answers the question, *How?* Given you are adequately motivated, *is there a key - a secret to success?* Yes. We find it much easier to follow Christ when we give control over to him. When we no longer demand our way, but relinquish the driver's seat to the Lord, trusting that he will take us to where we need to go.

4. Doing what God says is easier when you give your life away. Matt 16:24,25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." If we follow Christ, we follow on *his* terms. And he didn't make it easy. He asks for everything. To follow Christ is to go where he went, all the way to the cross! The cross is the place where you die. This call is not for the special Christians, the select few; he called us *all* to sacrificial commitment, self-surrender. This radical level of commitment isn't presented as one of several options - one of a variety of ways you can approach the Christian life. He's saying, *this is how it's done, this is Christianity.* It absolutely requires sold-out commitment. Rom 12:1 - present your life as a sacrifice! Christians are to *lay down their lives* as Jesus did. It's like the Marines' say, "*You may be asked to make the ultimate sacrifice.*"

The apostle Paul taught that we *live* the Christian life by *dying* to ourselves. This startling analogy illustrates the severity of commitment and the *finality* of choice. Gal. 2:20 - I've been crucified with Christ You can't be *kind-of crucified.* *When I accepted his crucifixion in my place, I gave up my way of life. This life is no longer my own. and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.* A paradox: *I'm dead but I live.* How? *I die to myself that Christ may live in me.*

This is not automatic; it's realized by faith. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Our response to the one who gave his life for us is to give our lives in return! 2 Cor 5:15 - He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. That's what I mean by *giving your life away.* Give it to him. Dedicate yourself fully.

Call: If you have already made the commitment to live for Jesus but have not been doing so, then it is time to *rededicate* your life to Christ.

Let me describe how this might look: I was walking and praying, using the alphabet to stimulate my mind about God's attributes. I came to the letter P. There are many, like *powerful* and *patient*. But I found myself praising God that he is *passionate*, he *pursues* us. Many of us are going so fast that we elude him. Will we slow down enough for him to capture us? I prayed like this: *Pounce on me. Come on me with power. I'm willing. Come over me. Take me over. I give my life to you anew.*

More Meat (unused random ideas and verses):

Satisfaction: John 4:34 - My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. An old hymn speaks of the results of obedience: *trust and obey, for there's no other way...* The pursuit of happiness can lead you into sin. Pursue God in sold-out obedience and you will find happiness along the way. It is a by-product of obedience.

Rev 3:3 - Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.

Eph 6:6 doing the will of God from your heart.

What do you hear when people complain about church? *I don't always feel good there. The music didn't minister to me. I don't want to be asked to do anything uncomfortable. It just isn't meeting my needs.* These comments betray that we've acquiesced to our culture's consumerism.

Rom 12:2 - Don't conform....

We don't want to spread the idea: *Here's what Christ can do for you, but here's what we can all do for Christ.* To soft sell would be politically correct, but Christianity must remain counter-cultural!

1 Pet 1:22 - Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth

Eph 4:1-3 quotes the commandment for children to obey their parents. And it includes the resulting promise: That it may go well with you! You want it to go well? Follow God!

Rom 2:16 - This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Gal 5:7 - You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?

Dwight Moody said, "*Character is what you are in the dark.*" When no one is looking. Inner integrity!

Luke 6:40 - Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

Our reception of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf initiates something new. 2 Cor. 5:17 - "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." Think of it, a new life! A life with power (Acts 1:8), a productive life (Gal 5:16) as we walk by the Spirit. Jesus said he came to give us a new full life (John 10:10), and this life lasts forever. You are just getting started.

As we follow Jesus we are to become increasingly Christ-

like in character. This isn't natural. It requires supernatural power to mold us into his image. The pressure from outside, our circumstances, would crush us except God is at work *in us*.

2 Tim 2:4 - No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. We march to a different drummer. It's all about serving God, not self.

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: *When Jesus bids us follow him, he bids us come and die.*

John 14:21 - Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. 23 If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 15:10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

2 The 1:8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 3:14 - If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.

Acts 7 Stephen's assessment of history is that his people had disobeyed God.

1 Kings 6:12 - If you follow my decrees, carry out my regulations and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave.

