

## **The Mind of Christ . . .**

# **A MIND OF OBEDIENCE**

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### **I. Introduction**

In the last lesson we studied several aspects of the mind of Christ. In this lesson we will focus on one of them – *the mind of obedience*. God created us with the ability to choose whether or not we obey Him. He could have made us like robots or puppets that have no choice in how they behave. But God refused to do so. His laws are to guide and protect us even though we do not always understand the reasons behind them.

When I (Mike) was five years old, I shattered my left arm by falling off a staircase. Although it was an “accident”, it was really my fault. I fell while wearing a new pair of cowboy boots with slick soles. Instead of ascending and descending the staircase in the normal manner, I was climbing on the narrow strip on the opposite side of the banister. My grandmother had admonished me repeatedly not to climb the stairs that way. But I chose to do it anyway because it was fun and daring and, of course, I naively believed that no harm would come to me. Doctors feared my arm would never grow properly, but mercy was in my path because I recovered completely. By rights, I should have a shortened arm to remind me for the rest of my life of my disobedience. I learned that my grandmother was not trying to deny me pleasure, but was trying to keep me from harm.

God is similar to Mike's loving grandmother who warned him not to climb on the narrow side of the staircase. Like Mike as a boy, children often do not understand the “why” of a warning and may think a parent or grandparent unfair or unduly harsh to try to deny simple exploration of this fascinating world. But if a child disobeys in spite of warnings and receives an injury, he may later realize that the words of warning were spoken to protect him and be more likely to heed similar warnings in the future. As human beings with a free will, it is hard for us to be obedient to anyone or anything. It is when we truly understand that God is a loving God and interested in our welfare that we can trust Him completely and surrender in obedience to Him. As the old song states . . . “there's no other way to be happy but to trust and obey.” Obedience has a negative connotation to many today. Everyone wants to “do his own thing” or “do it her way.” We tend to equate obedience with statements like “sit down and shut up”, “children should be seen and not heard” or, “do it because I said so.” But in this lesson we show that God is not being oppressive by wanting us to be obedient. On the contrary, God is showing His concern and protection. Just as Mike needed to learn obedience to his grandmother for his own protection, so we need to learn obedience to God and His laws and principles. Mike suffered because he didn't obey, but he “learned obedience in what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8) just as God sometimes allows us to suffer in order to learn obedience. But sparing us from pain is not

the only benefit of obedience. Obedience not only spares us from pain but can also spare us from unwarranted fears that painful experiences often produce. For example, a cat that jumps on a hot stove learns never to jump on a hot stove again. The sad thing is that the cat will not even jump on a *cold* stove because of a negative association with a hot stove. When we disobey, we learn a lesson but we learn too much. The suffering that often accompanies disobedience produces fear and a distrustful spirit. Obedience keeps us from having to experience the negatives in order to learn the hard way. The Christian life does not consist of just principles and doctrines that stimulate the mind and refresh the heart. Jesus' teachings were meant to be lived. In the Great Commission, He instructed His apostles to "go and *make* disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to *obey* everything He commanded" (Matthew 28:18-20). In this lesson, we will explore some of the key passages on obedience and identify reason for obeying.

## II. The Importance of Obedience

If you have been studying this course since the very first lesson, you have received much "head knowledge." But you will not gain the full benefit of this knowledge until you put it into practice. In Paul's prayer for the Colossian church (Colossians 1:9-11), he assigned knowledge and obedience their appropriate place in their proper relationship. He prayed for the believers to have a knowledge of God's will in wisdom and understanding so that they might live a life that is pleasing to God and bear fruit in every good work and grow in their knowledge of God. In Paul's mind, what begins as *the knowledge of God's Will* must end in the knowledge of God Himself. The personal knowledge of God comes only through the living out of God's will in one's life. In these lessons we may have also stirred your emotions. Emotions – like thought – play an importance and necessary part in religious experience. But a true experience is not complete until it expresses itself in a life of action.

***An emotional or intellectual experience that does not lead to a response is incomplete.***

Learning words which describe religious experience is *not* the same as living one. Without the practice of the Word, the knowledge of the Word is an exercise in futility. One does not possess a purity of soul who does not *obey* the truth (First Peter 1:22) – regardless of how much he may grow in his academic knowledge of the Bible.

## III. Reasons to Obey

### A. Jesus Is Lord

The Lordship of Jesus is the primary reason to be obedient. Intellectual belief by itself is insufficient. Even the *demons* believe in Him (James 2:19) but they do not acknowledge Him as Lord. The scriptures emphasize that a faith which trusts in and depends on the saving merits of Christ to receive God's free gift of eternal life is a *working* faith (Romans 6:22, 23; James 2:14, 24). In Luke 6:46, Jesus said: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?" Someone has observed that it is the supreme contradiction to say "No, Lord." To refuse to do what Jesus asks means that He is not Lord of our lives. Although Jesus has absolute authority and the right to expect unquestioned obedience, He treats His followers with dignity. He allows us to *understand* why obedience to His commands is in our best interest. Jesus wants our loyalty to Him to be that of *informed consent*. He forces no one to serve Him. He never says, "Just do it because I say so." In John 15:14-16, our Lord told His apostles: "You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known unto you." Notice the difference in the way one treats a servant and a friend. It is not necessary that a servant

understand *why* he is being commanded to do something for his master. But you don't treat a friend that way. Jesus allows us to be His friends by informing us of everything He has learned from God. *He wants our obedience to spring from understanding.* Jesus respects our freedom and dignity as human beings.

## B. To Keep From Drifting Away

Obedience keeps us from neglecting what we have learned and forgetting or drifting away from responsibility (James 1:22-25). When Christians become negligent concerning obedience to God's will, they find themselves drifting away – even from the things they have already learned. Thus, the significance of the warning in Hebrews 2:1 . . . “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” William Temple in Selections From the Writings of William Temple, (*The Upper Room*, Nashville, TN, 1968, page 8) writes . . .

“The test of our belief is always our practice. There are a great many of us who profess a belief in God and His supreme revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ . . . then we go on as if nothing had happened.”

On page 9, Temple addresses the problem of drifting away when he observes: “If you leave yourself to drift, you always drift the wrong way. You do not drift into public worship; you do not drift into service of Holy Communion.”

In Philippians 3:16, after urging his readers to strive to press on to maturity as Christians, Paul counsels: “Only let us live up to what we have attained.”

## C. For Spiritual Exercise

Obedience is spiritual exercise. It is necessary to promote spiritual growth. Obedience is to our spiritual lives what *exercise* is to our *physical* bodies. We need to “flex our spiritual muscles” so that we may grow from the “milk of the word to the meat of the word” (Hebrews 5:11 through Hebrews 6:3 and First Corinthians 3:1-3). We need to “grow up in Christ” and not remain spiritual infants or weaklings.

## D. To Build a Strong Foundation for Life in a Stormy World

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man, who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams arose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams arose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash” *-Matthew 7:24-27*

In this familiar parable, Jesus tells the story about the two builders . . . one wise and one foolish. The story teaches that the wise man – the one who obeys and puts Jesus' words into practice – is the one whose life will be stable and strong. The finest building materials in the world are of no value to a homeowner if they remain in a warehouse.

### ***One puts the building of faith into place by obeying.***

Obedience is the process by which these materials – the teachings of Christ – are put into use in one's life. The buildings that withstood the San Francisco earthquake in 1989 were built according to an anti-earthquake code. They were made of certain kinds of materials and constructed in certain ways so as to give them great strength and stability. Obedience is the way in which we build our lives according to the code of God. The commandments of God supply our lives with the necessary elements to give us strength and stability to withstand the earthquakes and storms of life.

**E. To Show WE Love Jesus and He Lives Within Our Hearts**

Jesus said: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:21-24; 15:9-17). There is a basic human desire to want to please and serve the people that we love. When we realize how much Jesus has done for us, and that His commands are given to enrich our lives, we want to demonstrate our love and gratitude by obeying Him.

**F. Obedience Produces Understanding Which Produces a Greater Ability to Do God’s Will**

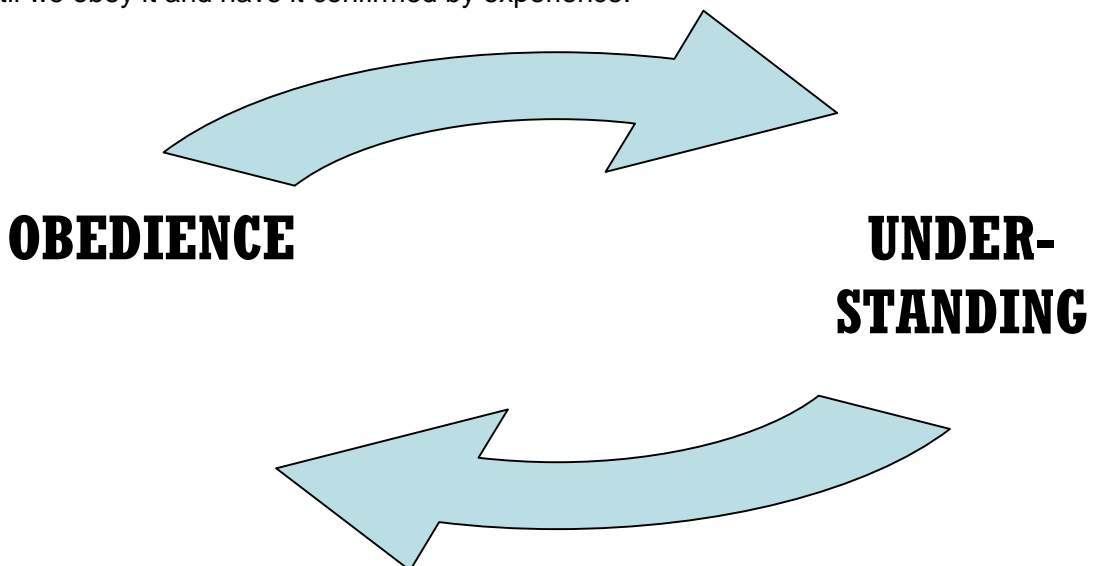
In John 7:14-17, it is said that the Jews were amazed at Jesus and asked: “How did this man get such learning without having studied?” Jesus’ answer? “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If any one *chooses* to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” This passage seems to be saying that greater depth of insight into the teaching of Christ comes from a choice to obey (or put those teachings into practice). In a similar vein, Jesus told the Jews in John 8:31-32: “If you *hold to my teachings*, you are really my disciples. *Then* you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” The practical application of truth in life confirms the validity of that truth and makes us know it not only from an intellectual standpoint, but also from an experiential standpoint. When we obey the truth we put it to the test in life. As the truth is borne out through experience, it validates itself and becomes more real to us. So we see that our ability to continue growing spiritually is contingent upon our obedience.

***Obedience is faith in action. As we understand and obey,  
God gives us the ability to understand more.***

When we disobey, we are blocked in our growth. It is as if God shines a spotlight into the darkness just far enough for us to take one step. But once we take that step, He shines the light another step forward, etc.

***As we are faithful to obey what we understand,  
He is faithful to give us more understanding.***

Obedience is the way we confirm the truth of God’s Word. We will never truly *know* the word until we obey it and have it confirmed by experience.



**G. To Resist Temptation**

Jesus gave us the model for resisting the temptations of Satan in Luke 4:1-13. In all three instances of temptation, Jesus remained obedient to the teaching of scripture and was

thereby able to defeat the evil one. God's Word promises that He will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear, but with each temptation will provide a way of escape (First Corinthians 10:13). Our responsibility is to look for the way of escape and take it. This is another way of saying we must be obedient to what God asks us to do – understanding that temptation always contradicts the will of God. The primary reason Jesus steadfastly resisted temptation was His knowledge of the Word (Matthew 4:1-10). But it was not His knowledge alone that allowed Him to quote scripture to Satan, it was His *translation of the word into His life* (Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:14; John 1:32). We, too, can defeat Satan with the Word of God when we translate our knowledge into our lives by relying upon divine strength (Second Corinthians 9:8 and Ephesians 3:14-20).

#### H. To Draw Closer to God

The more we obey, the more intimate God is with us. God has a special affinity with those who strive to be like Him. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

### IV. Biblical Examples of Obedience

A. There are many inspiring stories of obedience throughout the Bible. You may want to read these for further understanding of how people live out obedience in their lives. Hebrews 11 provides a list of some of the more inspiring ones.

B. There was Abel who obeyed God in the matter of sacrifice and died for his faithfulness.

- There was Enoch who walked so closely with God that he was not allowed to die.
- There was Noah whose obedience was so radical that he endured the ridicule and derision of his neighbors in building a huge boat to save his family from a flood before the first drop of rain ever fell.
- There was Abraham who uprooted his family from a secure and prosperous life in one of the ancient world's greatest cities to live as a nomadic herdsman as he followed the direction of God in his life.
- Then there are Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, and many others whose faith was demonstrated by radical obedience to God's will. Their obedience sometimes cost them dearly (Hebrews 10:35-38), but because of it God blessed them and the world through them.

C. In Hebrews 12:1-3, we are called to join this illustrious band of heavenly heroes by throwing off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles and run with patience the race marked out for us. We do this by fixing our eyes on Jesus and letting His perfect example of obedience inspire and empower us.

### V. Conclusion

The most effective portrayal of the contrast between the "hearer only" and "doer" (James 1) is presented in the parable of the wise and foolish man (Matthew 7:24-27). Children love to sing the song: "The Wise Man Built His House Upon a Rock." But how many of us – maybe even those who sang this song as children – are building upon the "rock" of obedience. Which of the two builders are you? One does not truly have the *mind* of Christ until one lives out the *actions* of Christ. The earthly goal of Bible study is to produce the mind of Christ in our minds *and* translate *it into action* so that – like Paul – we can say . . .

**"For me to live is Christ . . ."**  
(Galatians 2:20)

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

1. Although we do not always understand them, God's laws are to
  - (a) dictate
  - (b) enslave
  - (c) control
  - (d) guide and protect us
2. Being human, it is not always easy to be
  - (a) obedient
  - (b) animalistic
  - (c) ballistic
  - (d) none of these
3. The only way to be truly happy is to trust and
  - (a) deny
  - (b) hide
  - (c) obey
  - (d) die
4. Obedience spares us from pain and unwanted
  - (a) late fees
  - (b) fears
  - (c) due dates
  - (d) all of these
5. Personal knowledge of God's will comes through
  - (a) living it out in our lives
  - (b) correspondence courses
  - (c) audio tapes
  - (d) instructional DVDs
6. Without practice, knowledge of the Word is an exercise in
  - (a) water
  - (b) utility
  - (c) futility
  - (d) unilateralism
7. The primary reason to be obedient is
  - (a) the fear of hell
  - (b) the Lordship of Jesus
  - (c) the approval of your parents
  - (d) none of these
8. Obedience keeps us from neglecting what we learn, forgetting or
  - (a) obsessing
  - (b) objecting
  - (c) becoming obtuse
  - (d) drifting away
9. John 8:32 assures us that the truth will
  - (a) set us free
  - (b) set us on fire
  - (b) set us down
  - (d) set us outside the gates
10. We can defeat temptation with
  - (a) the fiery darts of the wicked
  - (b) assertiveness
  - (c) God's Word
  - (d) none of these.