

# The Obedience Factor

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Years ago when I still worked for a living, my occupation was an instructor, and I went to the internet like everyone does these days. I went to Wikipedia and got some information and later got chewed out for doing that. Boy, you can't depend on Wikipedia for any reliable information and a lot of times it isn't even backed up by fact. You can go there for information and that's what I did for my introduction here. The information I researched is "The rule of law." I'll read you just a little from Wikipedia on this particular subject, "The rule of law." It says ...

"The rule of law generally refers to the authority and influence of law in society, especially as a constraint upon behavior. In a general sense, the rule of law concept implies that every citizen is subject to the law. It stands in contrast to the idea that any ruler is above the law."

For example, in some countries we know the rulers will, by so-called "divine right," make up their own rules as they go along. Continuing the comment from Wikipedia:

"Despite wide use from politicians, judges and academics, the rule of law has been described as an exceedingly elusive notion, giving rise to a divergence of understanding. Everyone is for it, but have contrasting convictions about what it is or how it operates."

This is especially true in our politically correct driven society. An outstanding example of that is the recent George Zimmerman trial in Florida, especially with the verdict that came from that. Nobody is happy with that. Everybody wants a different verdict depending on where you stand or sit on the issue.

That was kind of encouraging for me because I recently got a summons for jury duty. You know I could already tell from that (even though I already knew this), the prosecutor is going to withhold or present evidence so he can win his side of the case. The defense is going to do their best to confuse the jury so they can win their side of the case. As it worked out, I did my last call in. That's the way they do it here. You don't actually have to show up. You call in and you give them a number that they've given you and they tell you whether you have to report or not. So I skated for two weeks, and I don't have to do jury duty. You can pray for me for other things, but not that.

That was the end of the quote from Wikipedia. The point is that the rule of law breaks down and people can pick and choose what they want from the law. They obey the law or not based on their own personal philosophy or their own point of view, whatever it may be. People unconsciously make those choices every day on whether to obey or break laws. We see that all the time around us. In fact, we live in a society that celebrates its lawlessness and its vulgarity.

One example of minor laws that people break all the time is speeding. I have to drive eighty-five miles to get here and eighty-five miles on the way home on a two-lane highway. When was the last time you saw a truck driving the speed limit? It just doesn't happen. If it weren't for the passing lanes, I may not be here yet. They do slow down going up hills, but that's about the only time.

It's against the law in this state to use a cell phone or to text while you're driving. We live a little ways out of town, but usually on the way into town I'll see at least a dozen people doing that, especially on the roundabout. They're texting on the roundabout. I guess they trust that curve to be symmetric all the way around where they can just set the wheel and text. But there are a lot of those things we could mention.

What about more serious civil ways, speaking of the rule of law? The murder rates are supposedly down depending on where you go for the information and depending on where you travel. It just says across the U.S., and again this is politically driven like far too many things these days. It says the crime rate is down.

A few years ago we were able to go to the Feast in Australia and when we came back home, we were getting a connecting flight into Seattle out of Los Angeles. We had to stay overnight to get the connecting flight the next morning. We had already kept the Sabbath "down under." We turned on the news which would have been Saturday morning here after that stay over. There were nine murders in L.A. that one night. Annually in L.A., there are 20,318 violent crimes, approximately 88,400 property crimes, for a total of 108,761 crimes annually. Los Angeles covers 472 square miles, and there are 230 crimes in every square mile of that city annually. I read somewhere else where 2,000 people yearly are carried into the University of Southern California Medical Center with knife wounds and gunshot wounds. It just happens all the time. I also read recently where since the Iraq War started (I lost track of when that actually started, one or two administrations ago) since then the Defense Department has actually sent their medical teams to the University of Southern California Medical Center for training. That's the closest thing they can get to a combat zone, so they send their individuals there for training. They say Saturday nights at the trauma center there looks like a mass casualty war zone.

Another news item recently is Detroit. They're going bankrupt because everyone is moving out of the city. They have lost about a million and a half people according to the information I heard the other day on Fox News. Most of those people have left because of the crime rate. It's just not safe there, so especially families leave. There went their tax base, so they had to go bankrupt.

Sometimes crime touches us too. Folks here wouldn't be aware of this, but in the tri cities recently our great grandson was murdered. It was a drug situation, a long story. I won't bore you with it, but we have been estranged from that side of the family for quite a while due to a nasty divorce that happened years ago. Anyhow, he was seventeen years old. He was involved with some other teenagers. An eighteen and a nineteen

year old got him to come out of the house. They were going to go out and smoke some weed and they shot him. So it touches all of us. The point here is that we live in a lawless society and we know that's under Satan's influence. We just have to watch the nightly news to see what moral decay is doing to our country.

We know too that this was all prophesied by Christ in Matthew 24. You don't need to turn there, but we've seen that many times. What was going on there in Matthew 24? His disciples were asking Christ a question. "What is going to be a sign of the end?" He said, "Well, all of these things are going to happen. It's going to be a test for my disciples, then and now."

***Matthew 24:12.*** "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold." (NKJV)

You may say, "You're taking that out of context to apply it to today." Look at 2 Timothy, chapter 3 where it talks about the end time being perilous times. We know all that. The point I'm trying to make here is that all these examples of disobedience; what does that have to do with the sermon? Well, we all know we should obey God and we should be living by every word of God. Once we repent, once we are baptized and once we have God's holy spirit, we are supposed to be using that in our lives, to walk in newness of life. It says this in Romans 12 in the first couple of verses. If we're really honest with ourselves, we have to ask, are we really as submissive and obedient to God as He wants us to be? Or do we draw a line sometimes? Do we do some things and not other things? I'd like to address a little bit of that today. What I've titled this is,

### The Obedience Factor.

Like I told John, it maybe sounds like a spy novel.

Like all Biblical topics, this thing has a whole bunch of moving parts, so I tried to break it down into six points. I'll follow Rick's format a little bit and break it down into points. Actually I have a little thing on my word processor that I can use bullets, numbers or letters, etc. Nothing up there says "Rick's". He does that very well though.

#### **First Point: Obedience is not negotiable with God.**

Some people think it is. Maybe we've played that game ourselves once in a while. It's not a bargaining chip with God. We can't say to God, "Well, I'll do this if you'll do that." We have the classic example of, "If you'll bail me out of this problem that I'm in, if you'll heal me this time, I'll be a good boy or good girl the rest of my life. I'll do everything you want."

Genesis 3, if you'll turn there. A lot of editors will go ahead and put the heading in here that the first few chapters of Genesis talks about the fall of man. Well, if we look at it in a certain way, it actually has to do with the failure of man and it has a great deal to do with disobedience. Regarding this opinion of obedience being negotiable with God, you

know Satan seduced Eve into disobeying God. “You won’t really die.” You get the idea, “Well, you can go ahead and eat of this tree and you still get the deal. You still get to live forever.” He fooled Eve into disobeying God by that ploy. That’s basically what he said, “Well, you can still get eternal life and still live forever.” At that point they didn’t understand that as eternal life. We will read Genesis 3, beginning in verse 7 from the New King James, breaking into the context here.

**Genesis 3:7.** *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they [were] naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.*

8) *And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

9) *Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to Him, “Where [are] you?” (NKJV)*

Of course, God knew where they were.

10) *So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (NKJV)*

God is testing him here.

11) *And He said, “Who told you that you [were] naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” (NKJV)*

Of course, God knew what was going on here and He knew what Adam had done, but he just wanted to see if there was any repentance there. We know from the story that there really wasn’t. He passed it on to Eve. It was her fault.

But they hid themselves. They were afraid, they were naked, they were exposed and they were guilty. They disobeyed God, both of them. They actually knew that and realized that. That word “naked” just means naked like a baby, an innocent little baby that looks to its parents for everything. That’s what that word means. Now they had just the opposite of that. They were guilty, and their morals were exposed so to speak. Their moral condition just became apparent and that’s why they hid. We don’t need to go on with the story, but in the end of chapter 3, God pronounced the pain and suffering and the curses on them and their progeny and drove them from the garden, all because of disobedience.

I’ll try to maintain the direction here, but if we look throughout the Bible, we can see all kinds of examples of that. Turn to 1 Samuel. We’ve been here many, many times. Rick covered this recently in a sermon and went through it in great detail. I’ll break in on the story of Saul in 1 Samuel 15:20. You have to think about why he disobeyed God. Why did he do that? Again we’ll read from the New King James.

**1 Samuel 15:20.** *And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord and gone on the mission ... (NKJV)*

"I did what God told me to do."

*20b) ... on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag King of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.*

*21) "But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, (he knew all that) to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." (NKJV)*

Remember back then obedience to God was demonstrated by the sacrificial system, so that's why he played that little game there, it was through the priesthood. You can bet there was something in there for Saul. It talks about the sheep and the oxen and the other things, but you can bet there were some other material things involved also.

*22) So Samuel said: "Has the Lord [as great] delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. [And] to heed than the fat of rams." (NKJV)*

So again, why did he do that? He tried to please God in that maneuver he tried to do there. Actually by proxy he was obeying God. He said, Well, I'm going to use everything for sacrifice. That's why I disobeyed." People use the same idea all the time. Here's a classic example: We hear people say, "I'm not really a church goer, but I'm a good person. So in the end it's all going to be okay. God is going to understand all that and it won't be a problem with Him." So Saul tried to cut a deal with Samuel, and of course, Samuel saw right through it. He knew exactly where his heart was. It says in the next verse:

*23) For rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft ... (NKJV)*

As in divination; let's throw a few bones and see if we can do something without God. That's rebellion against God. I saw a sign on a church reader board on the way over this morning. It said, "Google doesn't have all the answers. Try the Bible." Maybe we could write a scripture like that today; "Saul, you can't use Google."

*23b) ... and stubbornness [is as] iniquity and idolatry ... (NKJV)*

His stubbornness became idolatry because his ideas became more important than God's, what God wanted him to do. He allowed that to come between him and God. Samuel saw all that and Saul's approach.

*23 continued) ...Because you have rejected the word of the Lord (disobeyed Him), He also has rejected you from [being] king." (NKJV)*

Again, we could look at the example of Jonah and many others in the New Testament. We have the Pharisees, the scribes and the Sadducees. They all thought they could cut a deal with God by their dos and don'ts. They said, "If we follow religiously these dos and don'ts, God has to give us salvation. That's the way it works, right? That's the rules." Well, we know that is not true.

So the first point is that our obedience is not a bargaining chip with God. It is expected of us. We don't need to turn there, but the first couple of verses in Romans 12 says we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices, and the second verse says we are to walk in newness of life. By that we will demonstrate the will of God with our entire lives.

### **The second point: Obedience of and by itself is not key to salvation.**

Remember I said, "of and by itself." If I said we don't have to obey, I'd probably be in another church setting. In 1 Samuel 16, in the whole account here God is providing a replacement for Saul. He's going to choose David, son of Jesse.

*1 Samuel 16:7. But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance ... (NKJV)*

Remember Jesse's sons were parading before Samuel.

*7b) ... or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For [the Lord does] not [see] as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, ... (NKJV)*

He only sees what he can see.

*7 continued) ... but the Lord looks at the heart." (NKJV)*

We've heard this many times, but it's talking about the inner workings, the emotions, the attitude and everything that drives and motivates us. It has to do with that whole attitude of love, devotion and dedication to God, and that includes obeying God or not. God can see the difference just as He saw it in Samuel and as He could see the attitudes and the heart of the sons of Jesse when He was looking at to replace Saul.

When we have and use God's holy spirit, it affects the whole emotion and mind and the whole connection and motivates us to do what we should, following God's law and the other things that God wants us to do, because there are many things and we know that.

Have you ever done something and you know you shouldn't do it? Like buyer's remorse, you go out and buy something and say, "I really didn't need that and it was way too expensive," and you take it back? Sometimes we do that in sinning and disobeying God and we just feel kind of dirty. I don't know if you've ever felt like that. I have, more often than I'd like to admit. David went there. He disobeyed God. Psalm 51; we've never been there before. As we know, David obeyed God in many ways, but he also made a lot of mistakes and he paid for them. In Psalm 51, and again I'm

breaking in on the context here. This is what is important to God. What's inside is important to God.

Psalm 51:10. Create in me a clean heart, ... (NKJV)

That word just means chemically clean. You see back in verse 7, "using hyssop." If you remember, back in Exodus they used hyssop in a medicinal sense and also the branches were used like a paint brush. God said to take hyssop and put the blood on the doorpost at the Passover. So that's what that word means. When you talk about the heart and mind, that's what David was asking. He had a heartfelt repentance. Continuing...

10b) ... O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (NKJV)

That word "steadfast" in the Hebrew just means *to be perpendicular or upright again*. In other words, what he had done flattened him. Sometimes we can feel that way too, if it really ever gets that bad and we hope it doesn't get as bad as things did here for David because he felt really dirty. He felt terrible. He was repenting way deep down. He felt the weight of that gross disobedience. He knew he had done it in a resistant carnal spirit. It certainly was opposed to God's spirit and he was fearful that God had turned His back on him. This is a pleading and begging Psalm.

Again talking about the heart, the things inside, we know that what God looks at in us is on the inside, that He won't turn His back on. There is a very familiar scripture in Isaiah 66:2. God points out that He created everything, but He doesn't create that. That takes God's help and us making the right choices to make that change from the inside. It says in the latter part of that verse:

**Isaiah 66:2.** ... says the Lord, "But on this [one] will I look: on [him who is] poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word." (NKJV)

In other words, the individual wants to live by God's word in everything. Thinking of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, if you look at the background of the so-called major prophets, look at the conditions going on in Israel and Judah at that time when they wrote. Some tried to obey God, but many people didn't. We have that entire record. It's not unlike our time today at all. There are many lessons there for us. We are told that they are written for our examples. It largely revolves around obedience or disobedience, mostly disobedience when you look at the history of Israel and Judah. Back in Deuteronomy 5, here's something that God said for those people then and for us now. Again, this is talking about the heart, from the inside.

**Deuteronomy 5:29.** 'Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep (obey) all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!' (NKJV)

Here Moses is reviewing all the events that happened in Exodus. Do you remember the first set of tablets, the commandments that God gave to Moses? He came down from Mount Sinai and he saw what the people were doing, and he threw the tablets down and shattered them. So of and by themselves they were just words written on tablets. He wanted the effect to be in the mind, not just the words on a tablet. I thought about that when I was thinking about that example of what Moses did there.

I kind of like to watch Pawn Stars. I know it's kind of silly and some of the things that go on with the staff are kind of corny, but people bring in collectible items all the time. Can you imagine bringing in a chunk of stone with a little bit of writing on it, saying, "This is the original ten commandments." Well, they have an expert come to authenticate that. Who would they have to come in and do that? But it would be priceless. The whole point there is that obeying God's laws as we should doesn't say this unless there is an accompanying change from the inside, in the heart. That is what impresses God. Not that we can keep a bunch of do's and don'ts.

It gives a lot of weight to scriptures like we find in Jeremiah 17.

***Jeremiah 17:5.*** *Thus says the Lord, "Cursed [is] the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, ... (NKJV)*

One who trusts in himself and doesn't look to God.

*5b) ... whose heart departs from the Lord. (NKJV)*

Maybe his heart was never with God, but if it was and then we depart from it, look at the shape we're in. Scriptures that tell us we're in worse shape than when we started.

*6) For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, ... (NKJV)*

It gives a little picture of what that is like. We have lots of that in southeastern Washington, hills, desert, mule deer, coyotes and jack rabbits. We have all that and a bunch of dried up sagebrush. That's what it pictures here. It's saying that spiritually it's dried up. That's what it's like if you trust in yourself, if you don't look to God, if you disobey God or depart from God. You dry up spiritually. That's what the picture is here.

*6b) ... and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, [in] a salt land [which is] not inhabited.*

*7) "Blessed [is] the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord." (NKJV)*

He looks to the source of the laws and commandments, not just the words. He doesn't depart from them or the source.

*8) For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters ... (NKJV)*



Again here's another picture. In Psalm 1:3 it talks about that.

*8b) ... which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; ... (NKJV)*

You know, just the trials and the stuff of life, we won't waiver and we will still obey God. Sometimes it gets kind of tough doesn't it? Things hurt and we ask ourselves, "Is this all worth it?" We used to have the old thing, "Why did God call me now?"

*8 continued) ... But its leaf will be green ... (NKJV)*

Which just means healthy, and it's talking about spiritual health.

*8 continued) ... and will not be anxious (or fearful) in the year of drought ... (NKJV)*

When things are not so good.

*8 continued) ... Nor will cease from yielding fruit. (NKJV)*

That just means to prosper spiritually, to produce fruit, and we see that in Galatians.

*9) "The heart is deceitful above all [things], and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (NKJV)*

The heart mostly wants it (what?) wants it both ways, doesn't it?

*10) I, the Lord, search the heart, [I] test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways ... (NKJV)*

According to the choices you make, God will let you do that.

*10b) ... According to the fruit of his doings. (NKJV)*

God knows the difference and what we want to do is spend our lifetime letting God help us sort all that out, because God knows the difference.

So the whole point there is we obey God with the heart. We look to and trust God the Father and Jesus Christ for all things, not just hear the words.

So leading into the next point, we have God's holy spirit to help us with obedience, but there is an imposing other spirit.

**Third point: Satan's role in disobedience.**

We can't blame Satan for everything, but Satan certainly has a role in that. I'm not going to review Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, 1 Peter 5, verse 8 where it talks about Satan, fleeing from him and all that. We addressed that many, many times.

I'm going to use a little story to illustrate how Satan works in this. This is not a true story, but it has a point. It's about a community (Dale and Laura may relate to this a little). It seems a farmer in this community let some pigs get loose, and of course, when pigs are in the wild, you don't harvest them, they tend to proliferate. Pretty soon they had a plague of swine. They were getting into gardens and orchards and were doing all kinds of property damage. They would get onto the highway and cause accidents. People were getting killed. All kinds of things were going on with these pigs. They had an old boar. He was the "big dog" pig. He would actually control the herd. The people of the community got together and put out a big reward to anyone who could get rid of this plague of pigs. They had hunters try to kill them off, but that didn't work. They couldn't get them all. They had trappers but they couldn't figure out how to get them. Nobody could take care of the pig plague. One day this old guy rolls into town. He has an old beat up rickety wooden wagon pulled by a couple of mules. He's got a load of lumber in the back and some sacks of feed and he declares to the city council and everyone else that he is going to get rid of the pigs. They laughed at him, thinking, "Here's another nut trying to get the reward money." Anyway, he went out and found where the pigs are eating, where the head pig takes him (the old boar). He put out a little bit of feed and, of course, the old boar is suspicious of that. He thinks someone is trying to catch him so he won't go there. This guy is persistent and doesn't give up. He does that every day and puts out a little feed and soon the pig figures, "Nothing is going to harm me and I can go ahead and eat that." So he starts doing that. The old man put out a board. Of course, the pigs won't come because they see the board there and they get suspicious. But he continues and soon the pigs think the board is okay. Soon he has more boards out there and soon he has a whole corral built. When all the pigs were there feeding one day and they are all accustomed to this, the old man shut the gate and he has all the pigs.

You will recognize that as another version of "The Frog and the Pot." Well, that's kind of how Satan works, isn't it? A little bit at a time, incrementally; a little compromise here and a little compromise there and eventually the trap is sprung. It doesn't seem so bad to fudge a little with what God wants us to do, but it's really disobeying God.

We use that term Laodicea. It has become mud that the groups sling at one another when they don't like someone. It's an insult really, but we're forgetting what the lesson is about the Laodicean. It has to do with our condition, which is being lukewarm. It has to do with that predominant attitude of that particular church. It could be any church. Maybe it's me, but it doesn't seem that it's too complicated. We hear different sermons of what this and that means, but to me it's the attitude of, "Well, it's no big deal if I don't obey God in this little thing or that." It's like, "I'll do it when I get around to it." It's an attitude like that.

How do you suppose our success would be as a career if we had that kind of approach and attitude? The point I'm trying to make is that Laodicean attitude is irresponsible Christianity. It just doesn't work.

There is an entire Psalm about obeying God and it has a point in there. It's Psalm 119. It tells us what our approach should be to obeying God. The entire Psalm is about obeying God. Every line has something in it that has to do with obeying God, obeying God's law and everything. In Psalm 119 there's a section where it will go from point to point. I won't go into what every line means, but just breaking in at verse 33.

***Psalm 119:33.*** *Teach me (that attitude), O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it [to] the end. (NKJV)*

An entire life of learning and applying those things. When I worked as an instructor, I did that for twenty some years. I could tell when someone didn't want to be in a class. They were just there because their manager or supervisor told them they had to be there. It was part of their job. You could tell that they didn't learn anything. The attitude just wasn't there, and that was okay. That was their problem. I did my part.

*34) Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with [my] whole heart. (NKJV)*

Back in verse 10 it says,

*10) With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! (NKJV)*

*35) Direct me in the path of Your commandments, for there I find delight. (NIV)*

Something delightful doesn't hurt, and when we disobey God, many times if not most of the time, it will hurt at some point as God lets us learn that lesson.

*36) Turn my heart toward Your statutes and not toward selfish gain. (NIV)*

In other words, you can't follow two paths. You can't have it your way and God's way. It just doesn't work.

*37) Turn my eyes away from worthless things ... (NIV)*

That means focusing on material things. The parable of the sower is all about that. What does it say back there in that parable? "The cares of this world have choked off the word of God." The word "care" basically means *distractions*. This person is asking God to help him with the focus, because sometimes our focus gets off, and usually Satan will play on that and we'll disobey in some way.

37b) ... *preserve my life* (both physically and spiritually) *according to your word.*  
38) *Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. (NIV)*

Properly respect and honor God, because that's what we do when we obey God.

39) *Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. (NIV)*

That's interesting wording there, "the disgrace I dread." You don't need to turn there, but in 1 John 2:28, you might look at that sometime. The Complete Jewish Bible it says:

**1 John 2:28.** *And now, children, remain united with Him (talking about Christ) by your compliance (by your obedience) so that when He appears (when Christ returns) we may have confidence and not shrink back from Him in shame. (CJB)*

That would be disgraceful at His coming.

So our whole attitude and approach should be in seeking, complying and obeying God.

Peter describes Satan as a roaring lion. We've seen that analogy many times. What does a lion do with its kill? A lot of animals will bury their kill and dig it up later. I'm not sure what lions do, but I know that they will sit there and gnaw away and nibble away at that meat, that protein until it's all gone. Then they will pick the bones clean. That's what they do. That's kind of what Satan does. He will wear us right down to the bone. He'll pick us clean spiritually if we let him do that.

There's a section in Proverbs that describes this whole process. Proverbs 24. Usually the way the Proverbs are written, there's not a sequence of a story with a point and several verses, but in this particular section there is. Again, this is from the Complete Jewish Bible, if you have one of those. It sometimes makes it a little clearer.

**Proverbs 24:30.** *I pass by the field of the lazy [man], and the vineyard of the man lacking sense; (CJB)*

Lacking understanding of God's ways; that's the point he's trying to make there.

31) *There it was, overgrown with thistle; the ground was covered with nettles; and its stone wall was broken down. (CJB)*

No produce; there's little or nothing there.

32) *I looked and I thought about it, I saw and I learned this lesson: (CJB)*

It's talking about a spiritual condition. It's not talking about a piece of property. It's talking about a spiritual condition that any one of us could get in.

33) *I'll just lay down a little bit, rest a little longer, just fold my hands for a little more sleep; (CJB)*

You could add in there: "You don't need to do anything right now. Someday I'll get around to it."

34) *And poverty comes marching in on you, scarcity hits you like an invading soldier. (CJB)*

The poverty here is spiritual poverty. Nothing in your life works. It's a mess. Maybe you feel like you've been run over by a marching army like it says here. But the whole point there again is that Satan's strategy is to use spiritual erosion on us. You shift your attitude away from God until there is little or nothing left, and that comes through disobedience.

#### **Fourth Point: Obedience leads to more understanding and wisdom.**

We have Solomon's example in 1 Kings. We have a lot of examples and lessons from Solomon. I hate to say we can be thankful for his mistakes. Maybe we can apologize to him one of these days. We can say, "Solomon, you were such a terrible example. I learned so much from you."

*1 Kings 3:3. And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, ... (NKJV)*

I'm just breaking into the context here. Now to verse 6.

*6) And Solomon said: You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as [it is] this day.*

*7) "Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I [am] a little child ... (NKJV)*

There's a little bit of that Isaiah 66:2 humility.

*7b) ... I do not know [how] to go out or come in. (NKJV)*

He is asking God for help. That takes some humility. Do you ever get to a point where you're doing something where you just kind of avoid God? You don't pray for a while. You avoid the subject.

*9) "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (NKJV)*

He's saying, "I can't do it without help. I need Your help." He wanted to obey God at that point and it goes through the whole story there. He says he has done things according to God's word. In verse 12 God is admonishing him to do that.

12) *"Behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you."* (NKJV)

In verse 14, what does God say to him?

14) *"So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."* (NKJV)

As the story goes, we know in chapter 11 that idolatry got him. Here an idol and there an idol, a little at a time and it whittled away at him spiritually. There's a huge lesson there about allowing something to come between us and God. It erodes our obedience to God. You cannot serve two masters. You can't. It didn't work then and it won't work now. You can't have it both ways.

The amazing thing about Solomon is he didn't learn from his own Proverbs. He didn't learn a thing. He wrote most of the Proverbs; some were attributed to him. Somehow they got there, probably at least under his direction. Anyhow, God never took that wisdom away from him. He kept His part of the bargain. Solomon is the one that fell down. The same lesson is for us. God gives us what we ask for and gives us what we need. Sometimes we are a bit amazed at what God does give us, especially when we don't deserve it. But evidently he took that wisdom to the grave with him. It says in Ecclesiastes 12, and there's an important point referring to Solomon

***Ecclesiastes 12:9.*** *And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out [and] set in order many proverbs.* (NKJV)

God kept His part of the bargain.

10) *The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and [what was] written [was] upright – words of truth.* (NKJV)

Things that we should follow and do.

11) *The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.*

12) *And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books [there is] no end, and much study [is] wearisome to the flesh.* (NKJV)

If you don't learn anything from it, it's just words, it's just stuff if we don't apply it. Verse 13 goes on to say that.

13) *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: ... (NKJV)*

Here's a summation of everything that he knew.

13b) *Fear God and keep His commandments. For this is man's all. (NKJV)*

That's the way the New King James puts it. Some translations say, "The whole duty of man is the way of God."

14) *For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (NKJV)*

Again, that's what we will be judged by, the holy righteous words of God that we are to live by. The point there is that we cannot obey what we don't know. So to obey and grow spiritually, to study God's word and especially to apply those things in our lives, it leads to more understanding. That's how growth comes. Sometimes we think it's painstakingly slow, but it does come. I think all of us can look backwards in our lives and see the things that we've learned along the way, following God.

**Fifth Point: Obedience is an essential element of faith.**

It is absolutely essential. Matthew 7, verses 21 through 23.

**Matthew 7:21.** *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord.' Shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (NKJV)*

What is God's will? It's everything from Genesis to Revelation. That's God's will.

22) *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'" (NKJV)*

It's a lot more than just knowing what God's word said. It's what we do with them and our behaviors.

23) *"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (NKJV)*

We should be practicing God's word as much as we understand and as much as we know in our daily lives.

Here's another one of my golf stories. The great Ben Hogan was probably one of the greatest golfers that ever lived. Once he had retired from golf, he was out playing on the golf course one day and somebody asked him, "Ben, why aren't you out there still competing? You're a great golfer." Ben just looked at him and said, "Well, I need to

work on my game.” He was out there practicing. That’s kind of the same way for us. Spiritually, we need to spend a lifetime working on our game.

James has a lot to say about this, about obedience and faith working together.

**James 1:2.** *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,  
3) knowing that the testing of your faith (or faithfulness) produces patience.  
(NKJV)*

The Complete Jewish Bible says *the testing of your trust produces patience*. That is what God tests. If we continue, under trial, to follow what God tells us to do.

We have an individual that’s new attending with the Prosser Congregation and, of course, he’s having problems with Sabbath keeping. First he just wanted to quit his job and run away from it. Well, that’s not the advice he got from us. Just stick with your job, because once you leave your job you have no recourse. You’re done. You could be killed for even mentioning the Sabbath in some countries. At least in this country we have civil rights laws (1964) that give us some protection from that. So our advice was, “Don’t get into a fight with your employer. Just go to the Human Resources Department. They will have one if it’s any size at all. Tell them your position and they will work with you.” Guess what? He did that and his supervisor said, “Well, I’ll work with you.” Well sure, they don’t want to wind up in court usually. That was our advice, just stick to your guns and let them know what you’re going to do and don’t get into a fight with them. Where was I at? Verse 4.

*4) But let patience have [its] perfect work ... (NKJV)*

That’s another thing we told him, “Be patient.” He wanted everything right now. He wanted to be baptized and then start obeying God. It doesn’t work that way.

*4b) ... that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJV)*

It’s just saying there that we need experience in living God’s way in order to mature spiritually. It’s a process.

*5) If any of you lacks wisdom... (NKJV)*

And that wisdom is not just any wisdom; it’s following God’s way of life. That’s what we ask for. “God, help me to do this. Help me find a way to keep the Sabbath, even though people are against me and I’m being persecuted for wanting to do that.” By the way, that is especially hard for someone new. I think all of us have our stories on that, especially if we worked for someone.

*5b) ... let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*



6) *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (NKJV)*

Just frittering here and there, it's no big deal if I do this or that. We can't doubt. Sometimes we do have some doubts. Sometimes we have to struggle against doubt.

7) *For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;*  
8) *[he is] a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (NKJV)*

The whole point for the fifth point is that obedience is absolutely essential to live and to act out our trust and faith in God. We have to do that.

**Sixth Point: Our obedience is our expression of gratitude to God the Father and to Jesus Christ.**

***John 14:15.*** *"If you love Me (do what?) keep My commandments." (NKJV)*

I don't want to be unkind with a comment, but something that kind of distresses me (I'm not thinking of anyone in particular) it seems that there is a lack in Sabbath keeping in some areas. I know there are legitimate excuses for people not coming to Sabbath services, especially the last ten, fifteen or maybe twenty years there have been attitudes and all this and that. It seems there's also this attitude that, "It's no big deal if I don't go to Sabbath services. I can stay home and rest. God will understand that, won't He? I can just take it easy. I don't think God would mind that. Maybe watch a ball game later in the afternoon. God wouldn't mind that." What a wonderful gift the Sabbath is. It was given by God. It's in the Ten Commandments, right there, number four, right after the first three that tell us how we should approach God, how we should feel about God and how we should act. Remember the Sabbath. Did you ever look up that word in the Hebrew, "remember"? It means, *think about it*. We even have the day before. It's not a religious observance, but Friday you start thinking that tomorrow is the Sabbath. That's the way we should do it. Anyway, it's just a brief comment. Again, I'm not thinking of anyone in particular. I know there are legitimate reasons for people not being at services.

***John 14:13.*** *"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

14) *"If you ask anything in My name, I will do [it]." (NKJV)*

But it has to be in accordance with God's will. John 15, a very important part of the Passover. What is Passover about?

***John 15:10.*** *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (NKJV)*

How do we be like Christ? Obey God. Again, written by John in 1 John 2. How do we know God? How do we know we're like Christ?

**1 John 2:3.** *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

4) *He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him. (NKJV)*

No doubt, the whole world is structured Satan's way. We have many scriptures that tell us that; 2 Timothy 3, I mentioned earlier, tells us that exactly. Sometimes when we watch the news, we starting thinking, "Am I nuts or is the whole world insane?" It's all because people reject God, just like that reader board I mentioned. People reject God. That's the last place they will go. They'll always go to Google first. They never go to God. It goes on to say here:

**1 John 2:15.** *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world ... (NKJV)*

Meaning its systems which are self destructive.

*15b) ... the love of the Father is not in him. (NKJV)*

We can't love God, we can't express that by disobeying God. We can't have that love.

*16) For all that [is] in the world... (NKJV)*

That is all the things the world offers.

*16b) ... the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life ... (NKJV)*

Which is just our own self righteousness.

*16 continued) ... is not of the Father but is of the world.*

*17) And the world is passing away, and the lust of it ... (NKJV)*

You know, God is just going to destroy it all. There's nothing really worth saving. A thorough house cleaning; it's a mess.

*17b) ... but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)*

It can't get any clearer than that. It absolutely can't. It expresses how important it is to keep God's commandments and following God's will in our lives.

**1 John 3:1.** *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ... (NKJV)*

Meaning we are His; we're not adoptees.

*1b) ... Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.  
(NKJV)*

The world doesn't keep the Sabbath; all those precious gifts actually that God has given to us.

*2) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (NKJV)*

Spirit composition; be able to actually see Him. That will never happen unless we faithfully follow God and do the things we should be doing.

*3) And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.  
(NKJV)*

How do we do that? By living by God's word, practicing it, experiencing it in our lives. In a sense, we are writing that record with our lives.

*4) Whoever commits sin (practices sin) also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. (NKJV)*

It's disobedience to God, one of the first scriptures we heard, wasn't it?

*6) Whoever abides in Him does not sin ... (NKJV)*

He no longer practices sin as a way of life.

*6b) ... Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.*

*7) Little children, let no one deceive you. ... (NKJV)*

That's what John was fighting. If you look in the background of what's going on here, that's what he was fighting. Gnosticism was creeping into the church and they taught, "You don't have to obey God. You can pretty much do what you want. It doesn't really matter. Our lives don't really mean anything." That doesn't agree with any scripture. We have a ton of scriptures that say just the opposite. The whole approach was, and it was creeping into the church then, was that it's no big deal if we don't obey God. It's the same old attitude, that lukewarm attitude, "I'll get around to it someday. I really don't want to do that right now."

*7b) ... He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.*

*8) He who sins is of the devil... (NKJV)*

You've been had when we blatantly disobey God.

*8b) ... for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (NKJV)*

He gave us a way to follow.

*9) Whoever has been born (or begotten spiritually) of God does not sin (does not practice sin), for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin ... (NKJV)*

Referring to God's holy spirit, if we do sin it's not God's holy spirit doing it. It's us doing it.

*9b) ... because he has been born (or begotten) of God.*

*10) In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.*

*Whoever does not practice (obey or keep) righteousness is not of God, nor [is] he who does not love his brother. (NKJV)*

It gives an example here. It comes out in our behavior. It's how we treat people. Earlier it said not to love the world, the systems that it has. It doesn't say don't care about the people. It says the systems and Satan is behind that system.

*11) For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. (NKJV)*

The commandment that Christ gave.

*12) not as Cain [who] was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. (NKJV)*

Think about Cain for a minute. Cain had no relationship with God. He thought he could do things his way. He tried to cut a deal with God with his sacrifice. He says, "Abel is doing this type of sacrifice, but I don't really need to do that. I'll do it my way." So he brought a handful of veggies. That's not what God wanted. He tried to cut a deal and that's not what he was instructed to do.

*14) We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love [his] brother abides in death eternal death). (NKJV)*

That's what they were doing here. They were being confused by bad doctrine that said it really doesn't matter what you do. I remember years ago an individual in Worldwide. He had just come into Worldwide and was actually a local political figure. He said he was baptized and said, "Well, what do I do now?" The minister said, "It doesn't matter. You can do what you want." It wasn't a Church of God minister, but that's the approach. You don't really have to obey God. It doesn't matter what you do. Once you believe, you've been saved, that type of idea.

*16) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us ... (NKJV)*

How do we reciprocate? By obeying God; it's how we express our love and appreciation to the Father and Christ because of what they have done for us.

*16b) ... And we also ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren. (NKJV)*

It gives an example here. Remember too that they were in a survival mode here. It gives an example where it says if you see brethren in need, you respond to that. Again, that has to come from the inside, from the heart that is obeying God, and is practicing those things. They will give of themselves.

*18) My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (NKJV)*

That's the whole message of James. We have to do something with it.

*19) And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.*

*20) For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. (NKJV)*

It goes right back to some of the things we've already said. If we feel dirty, we've done something wrong. What does that Psalm say? That obeying God was a delight. It doesn't hurt, but it hurts when we do something wrong. Our conscience gets us because we've done something we shouldn't do.

*22) And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. (NKJV)*

Three things there. Ask and pray and God answers because we obey. We practice those things that are pleasing to Him. We don't get answers any other way.

*23) And this is His commandment; that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ ... (NKJV)*

But we know there's a whole lot more to that.

*23b) ... and love one another (which is an action), as He gave us commandment. (NKJV)*

Let's go over to 1 John 5:1. It talks about whoever believes Christ is born of God.

**1John 5:1.** *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.*

2) *By this (standard) we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep (obey) His commandments.*

4) *For whatever is born (begotten) of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. (NKJV)*

It's a living active faith and that even comes from God. If we're not obeying God, God is not going to give us His holy spirit or it's going to leave us if we reject the things that God wants us to do.

Maybe I've not made that clear, but the only way we can properly keep and obey God's laws, His commandments and every word that God gives us, is when we have God's love in us and that has to work through the process.

Love isn't the result of commandment keeping, it's the other way around. If we obey God and do what is pleasing to him, then He gives us His love to express to others and especially back towards Him. That's the way the process works.

Just as a reference scripture, 1 John 4:19 says:

**1 John 4:19.** *We love Him because He first loved us. (NKJV)*

So the whole point and what I've tried to say is do we have to obey God? Should we want to with our whole heart? You bet we should.

Let's just summarize the points we covered.

**First point:** Obedience is not negotiable with God. We can't obey God on our terms. It's not a bargaining chip. We can't say, "If you do this, I'll do that." We can't do that.

**Second point:** Obedience of and by itself is not the key to salvation. In obeying God's law, what we should be doing doesn't save us unless there is an accompanying change of heart. It's got to be there. It's got to be obedience from the inside.

**Third point:** Satan's role. Again, I think we're well aware that Satan will work incrementally; compromise here and compromise there until we're actually caught in his trap, because it all comes from disobeying God.

**Fourth point:** Obedience leads to more understanding. That's a huge result of obeying God. It engenders spiritual growth when we obey God and we don't allow anything to get in to erode that obedience and the relationship we have with God.

**Fifth point:** Essential element of faith. I gave that example of Ben Hogan, the golfer. I'll try to practice every day. That's for a lifetime.

**Sixth point:** Obedience is our expression of gratitude, love, devotion, everything towards God the Father and Jesus Christ. It's not a result of commandment keeping;

it's the other way around. God gives us His love because we obey Him and that allows us to express that, especially back to Him.

So obedience is a vital practice for every one of us. It was vital for everyone down through history. Christ's disciples ultimately gave their lives in obedience to God. Actually they followed God's way of life and that led to their end.

Let's just hope that we do that in our lives, that we practice God's way of life, that we obey God in everything we do and just strive to do that each and every day of our lives.