

THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

**“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:17)
(By Boyce Mouton)**

Notice that Jesus connected “knowing” and “doing”, with “being blessed” by God!
IF YOU WANT TO BE BLESSED THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU MUST DO!

Jesus spoke these words the night before Calvary. He spoke them to His disciples in the upper room. At that time they were not feeling blessed. In fact, they were very unhappy. There was a dispute among them about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24 -27) At this point Jesus began to “do” something. He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple’s feet (John 13:2 - 17). Jesus was blessed by what He did, and He wanted His disciples to be blessed in the same way. In the world, the greatest “sit” and others “serve”. In the church it is the other way around. In the church the greatest are those who do the serving. Jesus is our example. He was the greatest and He was among us as One who served. If the disciples wanted to be blessed they would also have to become servants. It is important to remember that we are to have the “mind” of Christ. We are supposed to think like He thought and act like He acted. In this regard we must remember that Jesus Himself learned “obedience” (Heb. 5:8) He did not remain passive in heaven but came to earth and became actively involved in “doing” the will of God. By doing so He became “obedient” even to His death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). If Jesus was “obedient” we also need to be “obedient”.

The idea that obedient people are blessed is nothing new, it is a central theme in all the Bible. Adam and Eve were blessed when they obeyed God, and they were cursed when they disobeyed Him. Moses promised blessings on those who obeyed God and curses on those who disobeyed Him (Deut. 28). Jesus also promised blessings on those who did the will of God. He said that not everyone who called Him Lord would enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who “did” the will of His Father in Heaven. He said that those who obeyed God were like people who built their houses on the rock, and those who disobeyed God were like those who built their houses on the sand (Matt. 7:21 - 27). Someday we will be judged by what we have “done” (Matt. 25:31 - 46; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12, etc.)

HERE IS THE DILEMMA!

We know that salvation is by grace, through faith, and not by works.

- **“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8 - 9)**
- **“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;” (Titus 3:5)**

At the same time, however, we also know that “faith without works is dead”.

- **“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20)**
- **“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (James 2:26)**

EVEN THOUGH SALVATION IS BY FAITH, THERE ARE STILL SOME THINGS YOU

MUST “DO” IF YOU WANT TO RECEIVE GOD’S BLESSINGS!

A LESSON FROM CAIN AND ABEL

The familiar story of Cain and Abel can help us to understand the difference between “dead works” and “works of faith”. Both Cain and Abel “did” something, but only Abel was blessed. (See Gen. 4:1 - 16). I’m sure you remember the story. Cain offered to God some of the fruits of the soil and Abel brought to God fat portions from the firstborn of his flock. As you know, God looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but not on Cain and his offering. What was the difference? The difference between these two offerings was FAITH! **“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.” (Heb 11:4)**

Cain worked hard, and on the surface, it seems that he was doing precisely what God wanted him to do. When Adam sinned God said: **“cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen 3:17-19)** In this passage God said nothing about keeping sheep, only tilling the soil, and Cain was a farmer who was “tilling” the soil.

As we have pointed out, the difference between these two brothers and their offerings is revealed to us in the book of Hebrews: **“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.” (Heb 11:4)** It is obvious that Abel brought his offering by faith and his brother did not.

DEAD WORKS OR WORKS OF FAITH

So, there is a difference between “dead works” (Heb. 6:1; 9:14), and the “work of faith” (I Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11). Cain worked hard but was not blessed. He earned his living by the sweat of his face but he was not blessed. He brought an offering to the Lord but he received no blessing. Abel, by contrast, brought his offering “by faith”. “By faith” Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice and “by faith” he was commended as a righteous man.

The most important part of the story is that “by faith” God considered Abel to be a righteous man. Abel, of course, was not righteous! Nobody is! There is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:10). The Scriptures are careful to point out that even though he was not righteous, by faith he “was commended” as a righteous man. This helps us to understand salvation. Abraham was not righteous either, but his faith was counted as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). It is exciting to realize that even though we are unrighteous and sinful, we too can be declared righteous by God.

Our justification by faith, however, cannot be completely separated from what we do. Even though Abel was justified by faith, he also brought an offering to the Lord. Abraham too was not only blessed because of what he believed, but also because of what he did. Please consider:

Abraham’s faith

- **“And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed**

be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Gen 15:3-6)

Abraham's works

- **“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.” (James 2:20-23)**

Note that Abraham's faith came first and it was his faith that enabled his works to be acceptable to God.

THE FAITH CHAPTER

1 Corinthians 13 is known as the “love chapter”. 1 Cor. 15 is known as the “resurrection chapter”. Hebrews 11 is known as the “faith chapter” of the Bible. Note how many times in this chapter that the people of God manifested their faith by what they did.

- By faith Noah built an ark (Heb. 11:7).
- By faith Abraham went to a place he would later receive as an inheritance (Heb. 11:8).
- By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau (Heb. 11:20).
- By faith Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph (Heb. 11:21).
- By faith Joseph gave instructions about his bones (Heb. 11:22).
- By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months (Heb. 11:23).
- By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Heb. 11:24).
- By faith the people of God passed through the Red Sea (Heb. 11:29).
- By faith the walls of Jericho came down after God's people marched around them for seven days (Heb. 11:30).
- By faith the prostitute Rahab welcomed the spies (Heb. 11:31).
- Etc.
- True faith manifests itself in good works. Note: **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10)**

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Jesus was not just a man of faith, He was also a man of action.

- As we have already pointed out, Jesus did not stay in heaven, He humbled Himself, came down to earth, and became a servant. While He served on earth He became obedient unto death, even death on the cross (Phil. 2:5 - 11).
- Peter pointed out that Jesus went about “doing” good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38).
- Jesus was so busy that sometimes He did not even have time to eat (Mk. 3:20).
- Jesus got so tired that He slept through a storm in a boat that was being filled with water from waves of the sea (Mk. 4:37 - 41).
- Jesus said: **“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)**
- Though Jesus was the Son of God, **“yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;” (Heb 5:8)**

- Jesus not only “did” things on the earth, He is still “doing” things now. Please consider: **“By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb 7:22-25)**
- If you are going to be like Jesus, your faith must also express itself in actions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE AND TIMING

- God sent angels to deliver Lot just in time. A little later Lot would have been destroyed with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1 - 17).
- God sent an angel to help Hagar and Ishmael just in time. A little later and they would have died of thirst (Gen. 21:14 - 19).
- An angel called out to Abraham just in time. A little later and he would have sacrificed his son Isaac upon the altar (Gen. 22:15).
- God sent an angel to help Elijah just in time. He was so discouraged that he wanted to die (1 Ki. 19:4 - 8).
- God sent an angel to kill 185,000 Assyrians just in time. A little later and the city of Jerusalem would have been destroyed (Isa. 37:35 - 37).
- God sent an angel just in time to save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. A little later and they would have died in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:28)
- God sent an angel just in time to shut the lion’s mouth and save Daniel (Dan. 6:22).
- God sent an angel just in time to warn Joseph that Herod wanted to kill the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:13).
- God sent an angel just in time to roll back the stone from the tomb of Jesus (Matt. 28:2).

The Bible is filled with examples of what angels have done, just in time. IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT ANGELS OBEY GOD IMMEDIATELY. In each of the above mentioned examples timing was important. For example, if the angel who called out to Abraham had been five minutes late, Isaac would have been dead.

GOD WANTS HIS WILL TO BE DONE ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Remember that Jesus taught us to pray: **“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10)**. When God gives a command, we need to obey Him immediately, just like the angels do. Please consider these examples of how immediate obedience brought blessings.

- Noah obeyed God and built an ark. He gathered living creatures to put in it. It seems that the project took 120 years (Gen. 6:3). Noah completed the project just one week before the flood came (Gen. 7:4). If Noah had procrastinated, the flood might have come before the ark was completed.
- When God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac upon one of the mountains of Moriah, he left early the next morning (Gen. 22:3). It was a three day journey (Gen. 22:4). At exactly the right time Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. If Abraham had waited, the ram might have been gone.
- God told His people exactly when to offer the Passover lamb and put it’s blood on the door posts of their homes (Ex. 12:1 - 30). If they had waited one more day their firstborn would have died.

- When Jesus wanted to observe the Passover He sent two of His disciples into Jerusalem. He told them they would meet a man carrying a pitcher of water and they were to follow him (Mk. 14:13). If the disciples had not gone immediately they would have missed him.
- When the angel of God commanded Philip to go south to a deserted road between Jerusalem and Gaza, he did so immediately. The timing was perfect. Philip arrived just in time to hear the eunuch read from Isaiah the prophet (Acts 8:26 - 39).
- When an angel told Cornelius to send for Peter he did so immediately. Again, the timing was perfect. The messengers arrived at just the time God gave Peter a series of visions (Acts 10:1 - 23).
- It is inconceivable that God would command an angel to do something and the angel would not do it immediately. If the will of God is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we too must obey immediately.
- Remember the story of the man born blind (John 9:1 - 34). Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud, and put it on the man's eyes. He then told the man to "go wash in the Pool of Siloam" (John 9:7). When he did so God blessed him by giving him the ability to see. God can also give us blessings when we "do" what He commands. God will remember of our work of faith and labor of love.

SAYING IS NOT THE SAME AS DOING

- Jesus said: **"There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you." (Matt 21:28-31)**
- **"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:15-17)**
- Jesus said: **"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)**

WHAT YOU HAVE "DONE" WILL BE CONSIDERED AT JUDGEMENT

- The five wise virgins were blessed by what they did; the five foolish virgins were condemned because of what they did not do (Matt. 25:1 - 13).
- The man with five talents was blessed by what he did. The man with two talents was blessed by what he did. The man with one talent was wicked and lazy and was condemned because he did nothing (Matt. 25:14 - 30).
- When all nations are gathered before Jesus in Judgement, eternal blessings will be given to those who obeyed Jesus. Jesus will say: **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." (Matt 25:34-36)**
- **And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were**

opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.” (Rev 20:12-13)

GOD IS PATIENT

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Pet 3:9)

- It is important to remember that God loves you and wants you to be saved. When you sin or make a mistake God still wants you to be saved. God is long suffering and waits patiently for his people to do what is right.
- God is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (Exod 34:6) He gave the Hebrew people more than one chance to do what was right.
- God waited patiently in the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20). Conventional wisdom indicates that God waited patiently for 120 years for the people to repent. God does not want to condemn the world, He wants the world to be saved (John 3:16 - 18).
- God was patient with Abraham. He told him to get away from his country, his people, and his father’s household (Gen. 12:1). Abraham apparently didn’t understand this and took his father and nephew with him to Haran. When his father died he still took his nephew with him. Finally, Abraham and his nephew Lot were separated because there was not enough pasture for their flocks (Gen. 13:5 - 13). It was after Lot was separated from Abraham that God made a covenant with him about the Promised Land (Gen. 13:14 - 17).
- God was patient with Hezekiah. He received a death sentence from God but when he prayed and wept God gave him fifteen more years of life (2 Ki. 20:5 - 6).
- God was also patient with Peter.
 - Peter denied Christ three times but Christ gave him another chance.
 - Peter was told to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:18 - 20). But Peter didn’t do it and God still gave him another chance.
 - In fact, for many years none of the disciples obeyed Jesus to take the Gospel to all nations. When the early church was scattered by persecution they preached only to the Jews. Note: **“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.” (Acts 11:19)** But God was patient and gave them another chance.
 - Finally, God gave Peter a vision to help him understand (Acts 10:9 - 14). Peter didn’t understand the vision, but God gave him another chance.
 - God gave Peter the vision a second time (Acts 10:15). Peter still didn’t understand but God gave him another chance.
 - Then God gave Peter the vision a third time (Acts 10:16). While Peter pondered on the vision the Spirit said to him: **“Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” (Acts 10:19-20)**
 - Finally, Peter got the message: **“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” (Acts 10:34-35)**

- If you have a good and honest heart God will also be patient with you until you understand and “do” His will!

LET’S GET STARTED

- It is important to remember that the commandments of God are not burdensome: **“This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,” (1 Jn 5:3)** God is our loving Father and only commands us to do those things which are good for us. **YOU WILL BE BLESSED WHEN YOU “DO” WHAT GOD COMMANDS!**
- Jesus said that the most important commandment in all the Bible is to: **“ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30)** See also Matt. 22:37 - 38 and Luke 10:27.
- Jesus said that the second most important commandment in all the Bible is this: **“ ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:31)** See also Matt. 7:12; 22:39; and Lk.10:27). Love is the greatest: **“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:13)**
 - Love is an essential ingredient to evangelism: **“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)**
 - When we love God we obey God: **“If you love me, you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15)**
 - **“The fruit of the Spirit is love . . . “ (Gal 5:22)**
 - **“If anyone does not love the Lord-- a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!” (1 Cor 16:22)**
 - **YOU WILL BE BLESSED WHEN YOU LOVE GOD AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR!**
- The Bible also commands us to CONFESS our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. **“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Rom 10:10)** Confession is not something that you do just once, it is a way of life. Every day we need to confess to someone that we believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus said: **“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 10:32-33)** **YOU WILL BE BLESSED WHEN YOU CONFESS JESUS CHRIST!**
- The Bible also commands us to REPENT! Jesus commanded His disciples to preach **“repentance and forgiveness of sins”** in His name to all nations **(Luke 24:47)**. **“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30)** Repentance means to stop doing what is wrong and start doing what is right! Even churches are commanded to repent (see Rev. 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19). **YOU WILL BE BLESSED WHEN YOU REPENT!**
- The Bible also commands us to be BAPTIZED!. Jesus said: **“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt 28:19-20)** The commandment to be baptized is the only commandment in all the Bible given in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When the people at Pentecost wanted to know what to do, Peter said: **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)** **YOU WILL BE BLESSED WHEN YOU ARE BAPTIZED!**

- Here are some other commandments which will also bring you blessings:
- Study the Bible - Matt. 4:4; Ps. 119:105; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16, etc.
 - Pray - Lk. 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:8; Ja. 5:13 - 16, etc.
 - Go to church - Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25.
 - Take communion - 1 Cor. 11:23 - 34.
 - Pay your tithes and offerings - Malachi 3:8 - 12.
 - Help those in need - Matt. 25:34 - 40.
 - These scriptural commands can easily be multiplied. Remember that GOD LOVES YOU AND ONLY COMMANDS YOU TO DO THOSE THINGS THAT ARE GOOD FOR YOU!

EVEN THOUGH YOU WILL BE BLESSED BY DOING ALL THESE THINGS IT IS STILL IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT WE ARE SAVED BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH, AND NOT BY WORKS:

Jesus said: **“Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'”** (Luke 17:7-10)

No matter how much we “do” for Christ, we must still confess that we are still “unworthy servants” who have only done what was our duty to do.

The idea that you can be saved without “doing” anything, however, is nowhere found in Scripture. Solomon is considered to be the world’s wisest man and was inspired to speak 3,000 proverbs and sing a thousand and five songs. In addition to the book of Proverbs, he also wrote two other books of the Holy Bible - Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. The book of Ecclesiastes describes his struggle to find meaning in life and to understand precisely what God wanted him to do. At the conclusion of the book he gives to us his inspired conclusion: **“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”** (Eccl 12:13-14).

A FINAL ADMONITION FROM JESUS

Please prayerfully consider these words of Jesus: **“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”** (John 12:47-50)

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(JOHN 13:17)**

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