

Obedience or Disobedience?

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[0 : 00] God wants us to be holy.

That's a tall order. And I think particularly when you live in a sin-saturated world, television and movies, and yet they talked in their day about this world can never be more sinful than it is right now.

But it is a sin-saturated world, and we have within us indwelling sin in our unredeemed flesh, and we've talked about that.

The only possible way we can strive for holiness is to depend, and I mean really depend, upon the provisions that God has provided to His children.

Let me mention some of these provisions, and I'm sure there are a lot more. God has delivered us from the reign of sin in our lives.

[1 : 20] God has united us with the Christ of the Gospel. God has provided us with the indwelling Holy Spirit by which God reveals sin to us.

We could say convicts us. God creates in us a desire for holiness, a desire to be like Jesus. God gives us strength as we pursue holiness in an unholy world.

And that should be familiar because that's the title of this whole block of instruction. The Apostle Paul had something to say about this, and it would not be hard to guess that his words are contained in the book of Romans.

I have great appreciation for Paul's writings, but I'm especially drawn to the book of Romans.

There's a commentary series out there by Dr. Lloyd-Jones, and if I win the lottery, I'm going to buy a set for me and a set for the pastor.

They're a pretty high dollar. All 14 volumes that cover 16 chapters of Romans. Here's our operative verse tonight, Romans 8.13.

[2 : 43] If you are living in accord with the flesh, and other versions say with the sinful nature, you're going to die.

That's pretty dramatic. That's the Apostle Paul writing the inspiration of the words of the Holy Spirit. If you're living according to the flesh, you're going to die.

But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. If you are living by the Spirit, then you are naturally putting to death the deeds of the body, so you will live.

Well, Paul, we know, was a master craftsman, not only as a tent maker, but in recording the words of Scripture.

Now, inspiration is, of course, miraculous in that without compromising the intellect of the author, the intelligence of the author, the emotions of the author, the Holy Spirit was still making sure they wrote down precisely what he wanted them to record.

[4 : 04] He was writing down his message, the Spirit's message. And that is why Scripture is referred to as Theoponoustos. I have no way to know if I pronounce that correctly in the Greek language, meaning God breathed.

God Himself breathed out the words which appear in Holy Scripture. We see in Romans 8.13, which we just read, the joining of God's provision and man's responsibility.

Now, remember when we started out a few months ago, I used the analogy of the farmer and God working together to bring in a crop.

Remember that? It's a great analogy. And I said then that the farmer is responsible to do certain things and God does certain things like brings rain and other things, but they do so in this cooperative effort to bring in a crop.

This verse is a good example of what we were talking about back then. It is by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God that enables us to put to death the corruptions that are seeking literally to

destroy us.

[5 : 37] And Satan would like nothing more than that. Isn't that true? At the same time, however, it takes action on our part as well. We see here the ongoing work of sanctification from the point of view of the Spirit of God.

We also see the work of man in this endeavor, and we will as this lesson develops. We have talked previously about the topic of by the Spirit.

We've used that phrase many times. Now we head on into the responsibility to put to death the misdeeds of the body.

Put to death the misdeeds of the body. And if you're living with the indwelling Spirit, you're responsible to put to death the deeds of the body.

And we can't even begin to do that unless we are actively putting to death the misdeeds of the body in order to live a holy life.

[6 : 46] We strive to live a holy life, but we have to put to death those deeds or misdeeds that so impact us and try to infect us in the body.

And may I say, this is not a one-time event in the life of a believer. A believer doesn't say, well, I put to death all the misdeeds in 1909.

No, it doesn't work like that. That person would be really old now, wouldn't he? I need to get a better date. Maybe 1929. It's not a one-time event.

We are to be engaged in this daily, hourly, if necessary, moment by moment. That's the Christian life. We are to be engaged in a holy walk.

We are to walk as Jesus walked. Who is ultimately holy? Christ Jesus is our example, our definition of holy.

[7 : 54] But who is to walk in a holy manner? those of us who claim to belong to Him through salvation. We do the walking.

Of course, if we're not walking according to the Spirit, we have no hope whatsoever of achieving anything out of that walk. We're going to stumble. We're going to fall.

We're going to fail. Remember, the Apostle Paul exhorted us in Colossians 3.5 to put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

Put it to death. Listen to the words of the author of Hebrews. I was going to add the phrase of whom the Apostle Paul obviously read, but I decided to leave that out.

Now, I don't often quote from the NIV, but I'm going to do that this evening, Hebrews 12.1. Very familiar verse to all of you.

[9 : 01] Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Here, the writer uses phrases like, let us throw off and let us run with perseverance. It doesn't take a mental giant, thank goodness.

That means I can understand it if it doesn't take a mental giant. Those are action words, aren't they? That's action words. Those are words that we are responsible for.

Let us throw off. Let us run with perseverance. We are responsible for running the Christian race.

We are to run the Christian race. I gave a speech years ago at Voice of the Martyrs and I used the analogy of a runner. I've seen him in the Olympics and I built a message around that and I said, we're to run that race.

[10 : 18] Now, as we approach that finish line, if we're stumbling and we're falling and we're genuine believers, we're going to finish that race. The Lord may pick us up and carry us across that finish line, but we're going to finish that race because God says we will.

Let's let the Apostle Peter jump in here. 2 Peter 3.14 Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him, with the Lord.

How's Peter strut that out? You make every effort. These are action words. that we're responsible for. We're to do a work here by making every effort.

We had a whole generation that thought we were supposed to move out of the way and let God do all the work and make all the choices for us and we're sort of going to get all that in by osmosis.

God does make provision for us, but He intends for us to use those provisions for our sanctification.

[11 : 42] We're to use what God gives us so we can be sanctified. And I ought to say this, and I will next year, but we're talking about holiness. That word sanctification is also a word for holiness.

We're going to be talking next year some about godliness. That's also a word you can fit in to the holiness scheme. But we are to use these provisions for our own sanctification.

And I think at this point it would be good to have a word from Dr. David Martin Lloyd-Jones. We're all fans of his, I'm sure. This is part of his commentary on Romans.

The Holy Spirit is in us. That's Dr. Lloyd-Jones. He is working in us. He is empowering us.

He is giving us ability to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. I was praying at 3 o'clock this morning and I covered that verse, you know, with fear and trembling.

[12:57] Dr. Lloyd-Jones, we have to do so. But note the accompaniment because it is God that worketh in you both to will and do of his good pleasure.

The Holy Spirit is working in us both to will and to do. It is because I am not left to myself. It is because I am not absolutely hopeless since the Spirit is in me that I am exhorted to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling.

The man that's not saved is not going to work out his salvation with fear and trembling. In fact, he doesn't even know what it is and doesn't care if he's not saved. He doesn't care.

To put to death the deeds of the body, we must rely on the Spirit of God. We must continually rely upon the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life.

But reliance does not mean we adopt an attitude of, I can't do it. Now, I've used that phrase many times in my private prayer time, but, you know, I can't do it.

[14:12] Rather, reliance fosters an attitude of, I can't do it alone, but I can do it through Him who strengthens me.

Big difference in those two phrases, right? Big difference. Because of the indwelling Spirit, we do not lack ability or power.

If we sin, it's because we choose to sin. Sin is a choice. I've said many times, sin for the unbeliever is a way of life. Sin for the believer is a choice that we make and a real bad one.

And we don't have to make it. You know, I'll be 74 in 23 days and I'm just now coming to grips with that. I hate to admit that. That's my confession for tonight, Pastor. I wish I'd taken you to a room and we'd done more of a Roman Catholic deal.

I didn't bring the Holy War. There you go. Okay. There you go. We choose to sin. It is never because we lack the ability and power to say no to sin.

[15:21] We do not lack that power. We don't lack the power to say no to temptation. And it took me a long time of great frustration to learn that.

A long time. And let me say, it is easy to think that we've been defeated by a particular sin and adopt a I give up attitude.

That's easy to do. But the truth is we are not defeated when we sin. We're not defeated but we are being disobedient because we don't have to sin.

Now there are miles between an attitude of defeat and an attitude of disobedience. We'll experience defeat every day. But disobedience, that's another topic.

Dr. Bridges has what I think is great advice for the believer. When we want to discuss or reflect on our progress and holiness, this is Dr. Bridges, stop using terms like victory and defeat.

[16:34] He goes on, instead, use terms obedience and disobedience. Don't talk about victory or defeat.

Talk about obedience or disobedience. When you go to the Lord in your private prayer time, you may have to say, Lord, I was disobedient today. But you don't have to say, Lord, I was defeated today.

I lost today. It's easy to say particular sins defeat me, therefore I'm not responsible for them. But if we look at it, all sin is disobedience to God and with that, the responsibility is back on our shoulders. It's on us because we've been given the power not to sin. It doesn't mean we won't, but we've given the power not to. In fact, 1 John makes it very clear, we're going to sin. And that's when we confess. And we'll talk about confession here before the night's over. The true Christian is defeated when he chooses to disobey God. That's the most dangerous path because when you do that, sin becomes easier and easier to commit.

[17:46] when you go down that path it becomes easy to do. And we don't want to be in that posture, do we? Dr. MacArthur was asked recently if he had to live his life over again, what would he do differently?

And his answer was very simple yet I believe very profound. He said, I would sin less and love more. And then he said, other than that I wouldn't do anything else.

Different than that. But I would sin less and love more. What we do, what do we do when we're haunted by a particular sin or list of sins that we've committed in the past?

We had a dear saint here, he's with the Lord now, and a good guy, and saved man, but he couldn't get over sin. that he'd committed, you know, and he'd come every Sunday, you know what I'm talking about, he'd come see me every Sunday and I'd go through it every Sunday and he just couldn't let go of it.

What do we do when we're haunted by the past? And this, of course, applies to all true believers. First of all, make sure you've confessed.

[19 : 12] Your sins. Using 1 John 1.9 as your guideline. And remember that beautiful verse because it says, when you confess your sin, He forgives you of that sin and cleanses you of all unrighteousness.

I had a minister say one time, He cleanses you of even the sins you didn't realize you committed or you've forgotten. All unrighteousness. But once that happens, what if we're still unable to cope with the past?

The Apostle Paul provides the answer and it's not even in the book of Romans. We read this in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi.

Brothers, I do not consider that I've made it my own, but one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Dr. MacArthur has a tremendous and great footnote on this Philippian passage.

[20 : 41] He tells us, forget the past. Forget past failures after you've confessed if they're sinned. Confess them. But forget past successes.

Now that's John MacArthur. He says both can debilitate you. You're either going to focus on the failure or you're going to focus too much on the success.

He said instead, press on toward the prize. Interesting, when I looked that passage up, I found a similar passage in the book of Isaiah, which is miles from Philippians.

And I've read Isaiah many times, but I just skipped over this. Isaiah 43, 18. Do not call to mind the former things or consider things of the past.

the goal's out there. It's still in front of us and we need to be pressing on. And the question really boils down to this.

[21 : 47] Who is responsible for our thoughts and attitudes and actions? Who's responsible for those? Well, who?

Yeah, well, a lot of people adopt the Geraldine attitude made famous by Flip Wilson. Now, Pastor, you know who I'm talking about? Do you know who I'm talking about?

I'm feeling really old right now. Flip Wilson played a black woman dressed the part. He's a comedian. I think he's dead now.

But Geraldine always said, the devil made me do it. That was her excuse. The devil made me do it. Well, you might want to try to use that, but I don't think you're going to get very far.

Because in the life of a believer, a devil can't make a believer do anything unless the believer assists and acquiesces. If he gives in, the devil can have a field day.

[22 : 53] Pastor Mike and I were dealing with a guy last week and he said, Dear Saint, and he's close to his maker because he's got cancer.

How many? Four areas of his body? Just eaten up with tumors and he's just down to weeks at best. But he's debilitated and he's concentrating on the devil.

The devil's attacking me here and the devil's... And I told him, I said, you know the best way to fight against the devil? And my charismatic friends don't like this answer.

But the best way to fight against the devil? Stay close to Jesus. Let him do the war for you. Let him fight him. Michael the Archangel didn't even speak bad about the devil.

But Christ, Satan's nothing to him. He's just a puppet that God uses for right now. Well, here we are mere days from New Year, 2022.

[24 : 03] I may be the only one in here and I'm really glad to see 2021 going away. Y'all feel that way? I mean, it doesn't matter what political party you're into. You ought to be happy 2021's going away.

And I've never been a big fan of New Year's resolutions. I discovered when I was younger that those are the things I break about January 3rd if I'm lucky to get that far.

So instead of resolving, and I mean that in terms of resolutions, let's use Bible language and call it reckoning or reckon.

That's a good Bible word. As the New Year is upon us and we're going to get there shortly, let's reckon!

on the truth that we have died to sin's reign over us. It might be good to take a copy of these.

[25 : 03] I only made 12 but I can make more. We could do this now. We don't have to wait for the New Year but when the New Year gets here, let's put these on the refrigerator. Let's reckon on the truth that we have died to sin's reign over us.

Let's reckon on the truth that sin no longer has dominion over us. And by the way, all these are Scriptures. Let's reckon on the truth that when God saved us, He united us with Christ in all of the power that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And how much power does He have? He's got it all. He can make, you know, He made atoms and molecules on the most distant galaxy on some planet out there that we'll never see.

See? Let's reckon on the truth that the Holy Spirit really lives in us and works in us to make us like Jesus.

Let's reckon that confession of known sin is part of our walk in holiness and should be done daily or even moment by moment if necessary.

[26 : 21] Now, let me just back up. that's important but people say, well, I want to walk in holiness but I sin. That's when we confess. Confession is part of that walk in holiness.

Or as Dr. McBride just said, keep short accounts with God. Keep short accounts. Go to Him in 1 John 1 night and confess. And by the way, I think that's homo legale.

It means name it. God sees it with and say, Father, I'm in agreement with you. That is sin. And I did that and I confess it.

That's when He forgives you and cleanses you of all unrighteousness. Let's reckon that God wants us to forget the past and press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And let's reckon that henceforth we shall make great progress in our pursuit of holiness in an unholy world.