

HABIT FIFTEEN

Obey From the Heart

“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”

John 14:15

In this chapter, we examine a simple frame of reference by which we can assess how well we are pleasing God. How well we are pleasing God centers on the answer to this question: “Are we doing what God said to do?” God lets us know what He wants us to do through His Word, our conscience, the authorities He has placed over us, His Spirit, and perhaps other means as well. At multiple junctures over the course of a day, we should always be able to answer “yes” to the question: “Are you doing what you are supposed to be doing right now?” This simple yet weighty question is the ultimate criterion by which we should live. It will help us to always live at our best and qualify for God’s great rewards.

You may already know this and only need to stay with your habits and policies and continue to be your best. If not, please know you will never become your best unless you believe it is possible to obey God — possible for you to know what God wants and possible for you to do it. If you believe that is impossible, then you cannot. Yet, in reality, it is possible for you to take control of your thoughts and reject the evil you imagine if you only will. Horrible as the thought is, some choose to remain in ignorance and disobedience, but that is not necessary. If you can change your mind, you can change your life. When you know you have the power to change, you can, and if you want to, you will.

Most Christians are aware that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Yet, in this chapter, we treat obedience as the ultimate criterion for measuring what is worthy of reward in a person. Why? Obedience includes belief in God and worship — believing the right things and saying the right things — which both glorify Him, but is not limited to those issues of the heart and mouth. Obedience also includes our actions, which have the power to complement or contradict our belief and worship. Our actions either glorify or dishonor God. In our obedient behavior, belief and worship find artistic display — it is beautiful to behold. Everyone does not see the belief in our hearts or hear our words of worship, but people do see our behavior. More are influenced, therefore, by our worship in action than by our worship in words. If we have integrity, our thoughts, words, and actions will be integrated — consistent. This habit brings our worship in action (obedience) up to the same godly level as our worship in thought (beliefs) and words (worship). May God burn this truth deep into our spirits — that obedience is important. God uses it as the ultimate criterion in rewarding us.

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This chapter does not focus on any specific area of behavior you are to work on or explicit command you are to obey. Instead, it addresses the theme of intentional obedience to whatever identifiable application you need to make. The Holy Spirit, God's Word, your conscience, or your superior will make it clear to you what specific application fits your situation. Let's leave that part sufficiently open to allow you to apply the obedience principle — worship in action — to whatever way your present circumstances require. The Lord is working on some part of us at any given time. Apply this to that part.

The Confidence of God

In the best possible world the triune God could imagine, His three-part self had millions of counterparts who could relate to Him in meaningful, intelligent, and loving ways. God envisioned Adam's race as being sufficiently like Him in our powers of choice and dominion that we would be intriguing counterparts to Him. Creating a race of such beings entailed the risk that we would not choose to love Him in return.

Nevertheless, having someone choose to love Him meant enough that He was willing to take that risk.

God is very confident. This is understandable since He has sufficient love, wisdom, knowledge, power, and understanding to deserve our love. God gives freedoms to man and makes Himself vulnerable to their choices. His willingness to do so is founded on His great qualities, abilities, and the confidence He has because of them. God is so confident that He can afford to take the risk of creating mankind with a free will and placing him in an environment where he can make real decisions. He was not willing to have only counterparts who would worship Him mechanically or coercively — without feelings, choice, love, and genuine admiration. That would not have been the best possible world.

In making Himself vulnerable, God created a situation in which He could experience the joy of being loved and the disappointment of being rejected, the happiness of being obeyed and the sorrow of being disobeyed, the delight of being willfully worshiped and the intense sadness of being willfully overlooked. God genuinely feels these emotions as He responds to how we treat Him. He is the best there is in the universe. When, to *our* loss, we neglect Him, He is saddened for our sake as well as His own even if *we* don't have enough sense to realize the mistake we made and what we are missing.

His response to our actions is not a calloused immunity to heartfelt feelings, as though He had watched the “movie” of human behavior a billion times over from eternity past to eternity future and had become bored with it. Human choices and their consequences are not a required, predetermined script played out in a prescribed drama. If they were, God would or could watch it with less emotional attachment because He would have always known what was going to happen. However, the God we see in Scripture and in our experience is intensely interested in the unfolding drama. He is extremely impassioned as He appeals for the affection of people. He is intensely interested, emotionally involved, and eager that we make the right choices. He is happy when we do and disappointed when we don't. Our obedience is the ultimate criterion for evaluating human choice and behavior. Obedience has the power to make God happy and disobedience has the power to make God unhappy.

To comprehend this, reconsider the sovereignty of God. Sovereignty is not absolute control in the sense that He overpowers human choice. God has deliberately given up some control — namely your decisions. That is the risk — the price He

was willing to pay in order to have meaningful relationships with significant counterparts. That is the way God wants it. God's sovereignty is not hyper-determinism. We often say that God is in control of everything, but that is not the case in the absolute sense. He is in control of what He wants to control, but He does not want to control everything. God has decided not to be in control of everything so that human beings to whom He has given a free will may live in an atmosphere in which real choices are made. Humans are in control of some things — their decisions — for which they are responsible. This best-possible universe that God created has the ability to delight the heart of God if we obey.

The Free Will of Man

The ability of man to weigh evidence, have his own chosen value system, decide to worship God or not, choose to obey or not, and consummate his own decisions with free behavior is an awesome and fearsome danger. Clearly, man is responsible for choices as shown by God's system of reward and punishment. The choices we make are real. The environment in which we make them is free. The consequences of our choices are enormous. We are responsible for our choices because the choices are ours. If there is no freedom of choice, there can be no responsibility.

Integrity is a strict consistency — integration — between what we think, say, and do. If you tell others what you think and you have integrity, others can reasonably guess how you would react in a variety of circumstances. God has integrity. Moreover, He has told us what He thinks. The Bible makes it clear what He wants, expects, values, and loves, as well as what He hates and what makes Him sad or angry. He is watching to see if we will try to conform our behavior to please Him or if we will become our own gods and live our own lives independently. How blessed are those who make right choices. How damned are those who don't.

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