

IS OBEDIENCE LEGALISM?

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STUDY GUIDE

LESSON 14

BUILT UPON THE ROCK
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ESTABLISHING YOUR FAITH ON A FIRM
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14. Is Obedience Legalism

People often feel it is okay to speed a few miles over the speed limit or perhaps to cheat “a little bit” on their taxes, but God and His laws work much differently. God sees everything we do, hears everything we say, and He really does care about how we treat His law. While the Lord offers forgiveness for our sins, does that mean there aren’t consequences for violating God’s law? Many Christians say that any attempt to obey God’s law amounts to legalism. Yet Jesus said if you really love God, you’ll obey him. So, is obedience really legalism? Perhaps we need to carefully consider the possibility that the devil has been framing obedience to God’s law in a false light.

1. Does God really see and take note of you personally?

“Thou God seest me” (Genesis 16:13)

“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known [me]. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou... art acquainted [with] all my ways. For [there is] not a word in my tongue, [but], lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.” (Psalms 139:1-4)

“But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Luke 12:7)

Answer: Yes. God knows you and every person on earth better than we know ourselves. He takes a personal interest in every human being and sees all that we do. Not one word, thought, or deed is hidden from Him.



2. Can anyone be saved in His kingdom without obeying His Word?

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

“But if thou wilt enter into life, **keep the commandments.**” (Matthew 19:17)

“He became the author of eternal salvation unto all who **obey Him**” (Hebrews 5:9).

Answer: No. Scripture is very clear on this. Salvation and the kingdom of heaven are for those who obey the Lord’s commands. God does not promise eternal life to those who merely make a profession of faith or are church members or are baptized, but rather to those who do His will, which is revealed in Scripture. Of course, this obedience is possible only through Christ (Acts 4:12).



3. Why does God require obedience? Why is it necessary?

“Because strait [is] the gate, and narrow [is] the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:14)

“But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.” (Proverbs 8:36)

“And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive.” (Deuteronomy 6:24)

Answer: Because only one path leads to God's kingdom. All roads do not lead to the same place. The Bible is the map—a guidebook with all the instructions, warnings, and information on how to safely reach that kingdom. To disregard any of it leads us away from God and His kingdom. The universe of God is one of law and order—including natural, moral, and spiritual. Breaking any of these laws has fixed consequences. If the Bible had not been given, people would have sooner or later discovered, by trial and error, that the great principles of the Bible exist and are true. When ignored, they result in sickness, torment, and unhappiness of every kind.



Thus, the words of the Bible are not merely advice that we can accept or ignore without consequences. The Bible even tells what these consequences are and explains how to avoid them. A person cannot live any way he wishes and still become Christ like—any more than a builder can ignore the blueprints for a house without running into trouble. This is why God wants you to follow the blueprint of Holy Scripture. There is no other way to become like Him and, thus, be fitted for a place in His kingdom. There is simply no other way to true happiness.

4. Why does God permit disobedience to continue? Why not destroy sin and sinners now?

"Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard [speeches] which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (Jude 1:15)



"For it is written, [As] I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Romans 14:11)

Answer: God will not destroy sin until everyone has seen of His justice, love, and mercy. All will finally realize that God, by asking for obedience, is not trying to force His will upon us, but rather is trying to keep us from hurting and destroying ourselves. The problem of

sin is not settled until even the most cynical, hardened sinners are convinced of God's love and confess that He is just. It will take, perhaps, a major catastrophe to convince some, but the horrible results of sinful living will finally convince all that God is just and right.

God is letting sin take its course so that in the judgment everyone will see and so that sin will never rise again. (Nah 1:9) He only steps in when there is no hope left.

5. Will the disobedient actually be destroyed?

"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast [them] down to hell, and delivered [them] into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;" (2 Peter 2:4)

"But all the wicked **He will destroy**" (Psalm 145:20).

"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:" (2 Thessalonians 1:8)

Answer: Yes. The disobedient, including the devil and his angels, will all be destroyed. This being true, surely it is time to abandon all fuzziness regarding what is right or wrong. It is not safe for us to depend on our own notions and feelings of right and wrong. Our only safety is depending on God's Word.



6. You want to please God, but is it really possible to keep all of His commandments?

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7)

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

"If any man will do his will, **he shall know of the**

doctrine, whether it be of God, or [whether] I speak of myself." (John 7:17)

"As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me." (Psalms 18:44)

Answer: God promises to keep you from error and lead you safely to all truth if you will (1) pray earnestly for guidance, (2) sincerely study God's Word, and (3) follow truth as soon as you are shown.

7. Does God count people guilty for disobeying Bible truth that has never been made clear to them?

"Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." (John 9:41)

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." (Hosea 4:6)

"Seek, and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7).



Answer: If you have had no opportunity to learn a certain Bible truth, God does not hold you accountable for it. The Bible teaches that you are responsible to God for the light (knowledge of

right) you have. But don't be careless with His mercy! Some refuse or neglect to study, seek, learn, and listen and they will be destroyed because they have "rejected knowledge." To play the ostrich and stick your head in the sand in these crucial matters is fatal. It is our responsibility to search diligently for truth.



8. But God isn't particular about obedience on every detail, is He?

"Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, shall see the land except Caleb ... and

Joshua ... because they have not wholly followed me. For they have wholly followed the LORD." (Numbers 32:11,12)

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"

(Matthew 4:4).

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:14)



Answer: Indeed—He is particular. God's people in Old Testament times learned this the hard way. Those who left Egypt for the Promised Land were a multitude in number. Of this group, only two, Caleb and Joshua, fully followed the Lord, and they alone entered Canaan. The others died in the wilderness. Jesus said we are to live by "every word" of the Bible. There is not one commandment too many or one

commandment too few. They are all important!

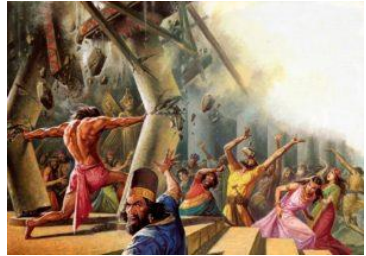
9. When a person discovers new truth, shouldn't he or she wait until all obstacles are removed before embracing it?

"Walk while Ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." (John 12:35).

"I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." (Psalms 119:60)

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Answer: No. Once you are clear on a Bible truth, it is never good to wait. Procrastination is a dangerous trap. It seems so harmless to wait, but the Bible teaches that unless a person acts immediately upon light, it quickly turns to darkness. Obstacles to obedience are not removed while we stand and wait; instead, they usually increase in size. Man says to God, "Open up the way, and I'll go forward." But God's way is just the opposite. He says, "You go forward, and I will open up the way."



10. But isn't complete obedience an impossibility for a human being?

"With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).



"Now thanks [be] unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." (2 Corinthians 2:14)

"He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5)

"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:" (Isaiah 1:19)

Answer: None of us can obey in our own power, but through Christ we can and must. Satan, in order

to make God's requests appear unreasonable, invented the falsehood that obedience is impossible.

11. What will happen to a person who willfully continues in disobedience?

"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26,27)

"Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." (John 12:35)

Answer: The Bible leaves no room for doubt. The answer is sobering, but true. When a person knowingly rejects light and continues in disobedience, the light eventually goes out, and he is left in total darkness. A person who rejects truth receives a "strong delusion" to believe that falsehood is truth (2 Thessalonians 2:11). When this happens, he is lost. Never take a chance and continue to do those things that you know are wrong.

12. Isn't love more important than obedience?

"Jesus answered... 'If a man love me, he will keep my words... He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings'" (John 14:24).



"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3)

Answer: Not at all! The Bible actually teaches that true love to God doesn't really exist without obedience. Nor can a person be truly obedient without a love and appreciation for God. No child will fully obey his parents unless he loves them, nor will he show love to his parents if he does not obey. True love and obedience are like

conjoined twins. When separated, they die.

13. But doesn't true freedom in Christ actually release us from obedience?

"If ye continue in my word... and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:31, 32, 34)

"'But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.'" (Romans 6:17, 18)

"So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. 'And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.'" (Psalms 119:44,45)

Answer: No. True freedom means freedom "from sin" (Romans 6:18), or from disobedience, which is breaking God's law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, true freedom comes only from

obedience. The citizens who obey the law have freedom. The disobedient are caught and lose their freedom. Freedom without obedience is a false freedom—it leads to confusion and anarchy. True Christian freedom means freedom from disobedience. Disobedience always hurts a person and leads one into the cruel slavery of the devil.



14. When I believe God requires a certain thing, should I obey even though I do not understand why He requires it?

"Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD... So it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live." (Jeremiah 38:20)

"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26).

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man" (Psalm 118:8).

"For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

"How unsearchable [are] his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans 11:33,34)

"I will lead them in paths that they have not known" (Isaiah 42:16).

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life" (Psalms 16:11).

Answer: Most assuredly! We must give God credit for being wise enough to require some things

of us that we might not understand. Good children obey their parents even when the reasons for their commands are not clear. Simple faith and trust in God will cause us to believe that He knows what is best for us and that He will never lead us down a wrong path. It is folly for us, in our ignorance, to distrust God's leadership even when we don't fully understand all His reasons.

The devil wants you to disobey God because he hates you and wants you to be lost.

15. Who is really behind all disobedience, and why?

"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning... In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God" (1 John 3:8,10)
"Satan ...which deceiveth the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

Answer: The devil is responsible. He knows that all disobedience is sin and that sin brings unhappiness, tragedy, alienation from God, and eventual destruction. In

his hatred, he tries to lead every person into disobedience. You are involved. You must face the facts and make a decision. Disobey and be lost, or accept Christ and obey and be saved. Your decision regarding obedience is a decision regarding Christ. You cannot separate Him from truth, because He says, "I am ... the truth" (John 14:6).

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15)

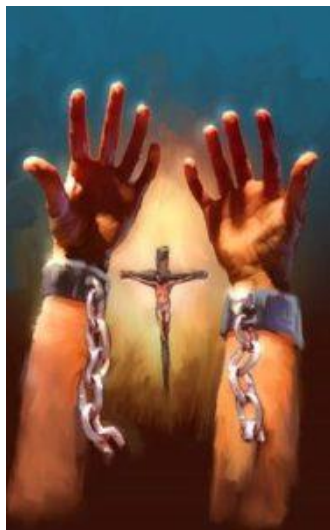
16. What glorious miracle does the Bible promise for God's children?

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ:" (Philippians 1:6)

Answer: Praise God! He promises that just as He worked a miracle to bring us the new birth, He will also continue to work needed miracles in our lives (as we gladly follow Him) until we are safe in His kingdom.

17. Do you want to begin lovingly obeying and following Jesus fully today?

Answer:



THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Will any be lost who think they are saved?

Yes! Matthew 7:21–23 makes it clear that many who prophesy, cast out devils, and do other wonderful works in Christ's name will be lost. Christ said they are lost because they did not do "the will of My Father in heaven" (verse 21). Those who refuse to obey God will end up believing a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12) and, thus, think they are saved when instead they are lost.



2. What will happen to sincere people who truly think they are right when they are wrong?

Jesus said that He will call them to His true way, and His true sheep will hear and follow (John 10:16, 27).

3. Aren't sincerity and zeal enough?

No! We must also be right. The apostle Paul was sincere and zealous when he persecuted Christians before his conversion, but he was also wrong (Acts 22:3, 4; 26:9–11).

4. What will happen to people who haven't received light?



The Bible says that all have received some light "[That] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). Each person will be judged according to how he or she follows available light. Even unbelievers have some light and follow the law, according to Romans 2:14, 15.

5. Is it safe for a person to first ask God for a sign to confirm He wants obedience?

It is not. Jesus said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign" (Matthew 12:39). People who won't accept the plain teachings of the

Bible would not be convinced by a sign either. As Jesus said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

6. Hebrews 10:26, 27 seems to indicate that if a person willfully commits just one sin after he knows better, he is lost. Is this correct?

No. Anyone can confess such a sin and be forgiven. The Bible is speaking here not of one single act of sin—but of a presumptuous continuation in sin and a refusal to surrender to Christ after one knows better. Such action grieves away the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and hardens a person's heart until one is "past feeling" (Ephesians 4:19) and lost.

The Bible says "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous [sins]; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." (Psalms 19:13)

QUIZ QUESTIONS

1. People will be saved who (1)

- ☐ Cast out devils in Christ's name.
- ☐ Claim to love Christ.
- ☐ Accept and obey the Lord.

2. **What three things listed below will assure me of receiving full truth? (3)**
 - _____ Ask my psychiatrist.
 - _____ Pray for light.
 - _____ Do what my minister says.
 - _____ Give liberal offerings at church.
 - _____ Punish myself.
 - _____ Receive a better education.
 - _____ Ask God for a sign.
 - _____ Study the Bible.
 - _____ Follow the truth that I now understand.
3. **God holds me accountable for (1)**
 - _____ Doing what my minister suggests.
 - _____ Following in my parents' footsteps.
 - _____ The light that I have and can have.
4. **When I discover new truth, I should (1)**
 - _____ Ignore it.
 - _____ Wait until I feel impressed to accept it.
 - _____ Accept and obey it at once.
5. **Full obedience to the Lord's commandments is (1)**
 - _____ Not possible under any circumstances.
 - _____ Legalism and of the devil.
 - _____ Possible only through Christ.
6. **Willful disobedience (1)**
 - _____ Leads to darkness and eternal destruction.
 - _____ Is okay for zealous church workers.
 - _____ Is overlooked by God if I am stubborn.
7. **Genuine love for the Lord (1)**
 - _____ Is better than obedience.
 - _____ Makes obedience unnecessary.
 - _____ Causes me to obey Him happily.
8. **True Christian freedom means (1)**
 - _____ The right to do as I please in everything.
 - _____ The right to disobey God.
 - _____ Freedom from disobedience and slavery to the devil.
9. **When a point of truth becomes clear but I do not understand why God requires me to obey it, I should (1)**
 - _____ Wait until the reason becomes clear.
 - _____ Reject that point of truth.
 - _____ Accept it and obey God's Word.
10. **Who is really responsible for all disobedience? (1)**
 - _____ The government.
 - _____ My parents, who trained me wrong.
 - _____ The devil.
11. **Why is obedience necessary? (1)**
 - _____ Because God is bigger than I am, and I am afraid of Him.
 - _____ To keep God from getting angry.
 - _____ Because I love God and want to follow His rules for Christian behavior.
12. **Why doesn't God destroy the disobedient right now? (1)**
 - _____ He is afraid to.
 - _____ He enjoys watching wickedness develop.
 - _____ He is waiting until all are fully convinced of His love and justice.

13. Does it bring you joy to know that Jesus not only provides the new birth to those who accept and follow Him, but that He also continues to work needed miracles in their lives until they are safe in His kingdom?

_____ Yes.

_____ No.

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