

To Love God is to Obey Him

Jesus answered and said unto him,
If a man love me, he will keep my words:
and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him,
and make our abode with him.

John 14:23

** “You can’t tell me that because I’m divorced and remarried that I’m lost?!” Tommy said, “I believe in Jesus as my Savior, He has written my name in the book of life and I am forever saved! If I have works in my life that aren’t right, why they’ll just be burned up, but I’ll be saved. Nothing at all can take that assurance from my heart.”

Tommy and I had become close because we often worked together. I enjoyed his spiritual interest and the fact that we could discuss Bible passages. Tommy had a goal to become a pastor and was a student at a local Bible seminary.

It took me by surprise to learn that Tommy had an earlier marriage that was affecting his financial standing. He was struggling to make alimony payments and this brought the subject into our discussion. When I found that he was now involved in an adulterous, unlawful marriage I felt constrained to speak to warn him of his peril... The discussion never gained any traction because we had a foundational difference in our doctrines.

** I found it difficult to believe my eyes when I saw my cousin and his wife after twenty years of separation. The last I had seen them, she was dressing modestly and he had worn clothing that testified to the doctrine of non-ornamentation of attire. Now his wife had her hair cut and styled, and their teen-aged daughter was even wearing a nose ring.

That surprise was dwarfed when I learned more about their present choices. Religion and ministry was very much a part of their lives. But even though they still attended a Mennonite church they had absorbed the prevailing teachings of Protestantism. I knew from earlier discussions that it was useless to share my concerns because my cousin had come to believe obedience to the Bible was not necessary for salvation.

** Sam and his wife, old-time friends of ours, and we were eating together after his mother’s funeral. I saw that not only had they continued to wear the distinctive attire that identifies him as a conservative Mennonite they had even added a few extra symbols showing loyalty to the traditions of the fathers. But my heart sank as he began to talk about the bitter squabble he and his siblings were having over the family inheritance.

The younger brother had somehow influenced his mom to rewrite the will and to the ire of the other siblings, the family business and real estate had been turned this younger brother's way. I understood from a natural perspective why Sam felt that he had been wronged. It was not that Sam and the other cheated siblings were suffering financially. They had not been treated fairly and were facing issues of forgiveness.

** Each of these accounts has details altered for confidentiality. Sadly, each one is also true in concept. I would consider each one of these situations to be troubling from an eternal perspective. Why? Because Jesus taught that it is essential that we obey His commands in every area of our lives. Only eternity will reveal the differences.

The Two Destinies

As Jesus came to the close of the Sermon on the Mount, He brought the reality of the cost of discipleship into clear focus. Listen to His words, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”* (Matthew 7:13-14)

John the Baptist had already laid out the personal cost of being a part of the Kingdom of Heaven. His message began with the need for each person to come to repentance before God and men. This means we own our personal sin, confess it before men and forsake it for a walk of holiness. His message included the personal choice of baptism – an outward sign of personal sanctification for use in Jesus' spiritual temple.

Jesus' teaching is that there are two ways to live one's life. The broad way which offers a person the freedom to live selfishly in personal lusts and pleasures leads to destruction. If the masses in Jesus' day were enticed, how much more today with all the inventions that cater to personal indulgence and philosophies that justify selfishness.

But Jesus pulls the curtain back to show us the reality of eternity. He shows us three sobering realities:

- Religious teachers who preach salvation but live in personal failure are false prophets. (Matt 7:15-20)
- All who disobey Jesus' teaching and live with sin in their lives are destined to an eternity in hellfire. *“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. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”* (Matthew 7:21-23)
- It is folly to choose temporary values instead of eternal goals. When we live with the goals of the natural man, we may build an impressive life-style before men but in the end, our life will come crashing down in eternal disaster. When we carefully weigh Jesus' teaching and adjust our lives accordingly we will be building on a rock, endure the tests of time and prepare for eternity. (Read Matthew 7:24-27)

Deceitful Doctrines

As we build on Jesus' teaching and study the words of the Apostles we find the recurring theme of leaders who pretend to be religious and spiritual, but who's teaching and example are taking people down the broad road to perdition. The Bible considers false teachers and false religions to be a serious threat, especially in the last days. (Mark 13:22; 2Peter 2:1-3; 2Timothy 4:3-4 etc)

In the centuries of church history following the apostolic era and up until the

printing press, we find a prevailing snare was ignorance of God's Word. Strong leaders such as Augustine of Hippo brought false teaching into the nominal church. A large majority of the people were corrupted by the teaching of the church. Yes, they continued to baptize and gather to worship but in baptizing babies personal accountability was lost. When obeying Jesus' commands such as observing the Lord's supper were transformed into ways to merit salvation, and a person could earn forgiveness through acts of penitence, the entire teaching of Christ became corrupted.

Then the invention of the printing press put God's Word into the hands of ordinary people. Many came to personal faith and discipleship of Christ. But where God is doing His work of sharing Truth, the devil quickly follows in spreading error. As one looks around he can find almost any interpretation of the Bible resulting in cults of every kind. We all are aware of the errors of Mormonism or the Jehovah's Witnesses.

But two errors come close home to us as conservative Mennonites in America. One is the error of **"Free Grace"**. The other is the error of the **"Leaven of the Pharisees"**, which is hypocrisy.

The Free Grace doctrine is a response to the error of Calvinism. Calvinism teaches predestination. Free grace correctly teaches we each must make the choice to accept Jesus and believe on Him for salvation. This error is summed up in the idea that any effort to obey him is a sign that we are trusting in works for salvation. A statement from their writers follows. "One of the unique aspects of free grace theology is its position on assurance. All free grace advocates agree that assurance of spending eternity with God is based on the promise of scripture through faith alone in Jesus Christ, and not one's works or subsequent progression in sanctification."

This doctrine is built upon a few verses. Ephesians 2:8-9 is used to say that all works would make one boast so salvation comes by faith alone. One Greek scholar translates the verse this way, "And this salvation is not from you as a source, of God it is a gift, not from a source of man's works, in order that no one might boast..." This understanding complements the rest of New Testament teaching for salvation. Jesus and the Apostles always gave things to do when someone asked what they must do for salvation.

Another false premise is when verses in Romans and Galatians, which are meant to take away trust in the works of the law, are somehow applied to obedience to New Testament commands. The New Testament does not ask for obedience to Christ and the Apostles and then call it "works" that must be replaced by faith. The "faith" is the New Testament obedience.

It is easy to see the influence of this doctrine on American "Christianity". When disobedience such as divorce and remarriage, involvement in pornography, transgenderism, homosexual marriages etc, are the norm in the church, it is obvious something is seriously wrong. Free grace does not begin with these sins unto death, but it's platform opens the door for them. (See additional information in the pamphlet 'What Must I Do to be Saved?')

The Leaven of the Pharisee doctrine neglects the heart-felt personal discipleship of Jesus in favor of performance of church rules. A person is measured by how well he pays attention to minor details the church group is asking for. Even as the Pharisees who "strained at gnats but swallowed camels", when a person has outward details in place, he may give himself permission to pursue personal lusts and pleasures as long as these sins stay well hidden. Likewise, the church group itself may choose to overlook the errors of its members as long as these errors stay hidden and do not come to the

surface.

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Jesus and the disciples brought a strong emphasis on personal discipleship and obedience for salvation. The following references highlight this truth:

- John 14:15 Jesus equates obedience with love. When a person chooses to deny himself out of obedience to Christ, the Father and the Son enter into special fellowship with him. John 14:21-24; John 15:10-14
- 1 John 2:3-6 The proof of a person knowing Jesus is if he consistently personally keeps Jesus' commandments. Disobedience is proof one is of the devil. 1 John 2:29; 1John 3:5-10; 1 John 5:2-3
- Acts 6:7 The proof of becoming a Christian is being obedient to the faith. Romans 1:5 Romans 16:26
- Luke 6:46-49 A person who builds a great life outside of Christ builds a house on sand. Matthew 7:24-27
- Luke 13:25-28 Saying "Lord, Lord" but living in disobedience will destine us with the workers of iniquity. Matthew 7:21-23
- Romans 2:7-9 Living a transparent life for Christ will bring great reward, but hiding private sins will bring eternal anguish.
- James 1:21-25 Allowing reading and meditation on the Bible to cleanse us from sin is the only way to make it to heaven
- Revelation 22:14-15 Keeping Jesus' commandments entitles one to enter heaven's gates, while disobedience and sin destine one to the lake of fire.

How shall we then live?

It is very clear that some of Jesus' commands are kept personally and some are observed collectively. In light of this, we offer two answers if you desire to be a part of eternal reward.

Make a personal choice to follow Christ in every area of your life. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:10-11 The next time you are tempted with your favorite sin or to enjoy a bad attitude, tell yourself "NO! I love my Master too much to compromise my relationship with Him. I will be obedient to the truth that I know!".

Be an active member of a church group that endeavors to keep all the commandments of Christ. There are commandments that Christ and the Apostles gave that are essential for salvation that you cannot keep all by yourself. You cannot obey Christ's command for washing one another's feet by yourself. You cannot observe the practice of the holy kiss by yourself. It is clear that the New Testament norm was for disciples of Christ to live out their faith in a collective body. Find a Scriptural church. Then be a part of that. Your fellowship will not be perfect, but you will be far better off than to live in disobedience. Also serve Christ by what you do for His Bride. If your church gives permission to disobedience to the Word of God, flee that society and find a church that practices all the ordinances of God.

Calvary Mennonite Church
H. Stephen Ebersole 1/10/21

15 If ye love me, keep my commandments. **John 14:15**

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. 22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? 23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. 24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. **John 14:21-24**

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. 12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. **John 15:10-14**

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. 6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. **1 John 2:3-6**

29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. **1 John 2:29**

And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. 6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. 7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. 8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. **1 John 3:5-10**

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. **1 John 5:2-3**

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. **Acts 6:7**

5 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: **Romans 1:5**

26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: **Romans 16:26**

46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? 47 Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: 48 He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. 49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. **Luke 6:46-49**

25 When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: 26 Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. 27 But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. 28 There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. **Luke 13:25-28**

7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: 8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; **Romans 2:7-9**

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. **James 1:21-25**

4 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. 15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. Revelation 22:14-15

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. 1 Corinthians 9:25-27