



LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

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Both love and obedience can be clearly understood, when John wrote this letter; but it is another matter entirely whether our society today genuinely wants to hear such absolute commands today.

Any absolutes which formed the bedrock of western society for generations are now going in the same direction as the Dodo. We have built a world based on free choices, not obedience. We have viewed love as attraction, which, when the feeling passes, may be directed elsewhere on a whim.

Anyone who watches the programme Love Island will soon realise that the word love does not actually mean what it is meant to mean. In fact, it means just about the opposite of what it is meant to mean. We rarely hear calls for obedience and love as work. In each case such calls may cost me my freedom. They may limit my spontaneity. They may put boundaries and restrictions around what I can and cannot do.

The groom of a couple in America who recently got married, said to the chaplain after he took the vows; sure, I'll love my wife; but I don't want love taking away my freedom'. I wonder if they are still married.

This attitude that flees from obedience and sees love as a passing affection is widespread today and sadly it is corrupting the minds of many young people.

It's very difficult to get John's message across that true freedom comes from disciplined obedience. Its like a pilot in training. A pilot is told that there are certain things they cannot do, certain things they cannot drink or smoke, what they must wear. Where they are allowed to walk. How long they are allowed to fly.

You have to obey these rules because if you don't you can get killed and you can kill others. It's obedience to the rules

that makes flying possible, that makes you complete your mission. But the word obey generally has negative connotations for many. Some people who have grown up in very conservative churches where obedience and righteousness were pounded home so often feel suffocated by them.

Obey we say; but God loves me; so let me simply enjoy him and live. Quite often to make the church look more grace filled, the church uses the idea of obedience in a negative way; the synagogue versus the church; Jesus versus Moses.

Paul versus the Jerusalem legalists; grace versus law. When Jesus said; that he had fulfilled scripture, he did not mean that the ten commandments are to be now discarded and ignored. It means that all of the law has now been fulfilled and brought together in Jesus. In other words, Jesus becomes a walking and talking version of what is in the bible. What you read about in the bible; you see lived out in Jesus.

Jesus went on to say; 'do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them.'

But who or what should we Obey. Naturally we will say that we obey the Lord. Which is correct; but how. We obey the teachings of Jesus found today in the bible which should be the basis of our obedience. It is the perfect place to begin. Why do we obey God? We obey God's law to help us live happier, contented, healthier lives. We also receive God's blessings as we do so. Obedience to God is linked with blessing.

Is the world a place today where we might be aware of God's blessing?

We can read in the OT how this combination of

Obedience and Blessing affected the children of Israel. We can read time and time again that when the people obeyed God they were blessed, and when they refused things went against them. It came as no shock to them because God told them through Moses what exactly would happen.

A point of warning. We need to be careful of those in authority like the Pharisees and certain Christian leaders even today, who claim that their interpretation of scripture or their application of it in the church becomes God's rule, and absolute conformity is demanded and expected.

There is a delicate balance here with obedience that each of us must find ourselves. On the one hand we dare not compromise the doctrine of God's grace freely given; and yet there must be a call to what it means to be a follower of Jesus that show's his grace, has transformed a person's life. One Absolute command that Jesus calls us to do; is to Love. This is a Christian absolute; a Christian must. It is not negotiable.

However, sometimes we speak of it so often that we have become dulled from hearing afresh its demands on us. Of course, we're loving we say, we're Christians aren't we. We can use the word Love to mean the same as when we say, I love stewed prunes, or, I love burnt toast.

But we will only understand what love means when we understand that love, light, and life all work together. You cannot take love in isolation from everything else and expect it to flourish.

Christian love is affected by light and darkness. A Christian who is walking in the light which simply means they are obeying God, is going to love his brother or sister Christian. Further on in John chapter 3 we are told that Christian love is a matter of life and death. To live in hatred is to live in spiritual death. If we know God's love towards us, we in turn should show God's love towards others. God has commanded us to love. He first revealed his love to us.

The commandment to love one another is not an appendix to our Christian experience or some insignificant after thought. No. It is placed in our hearts from the very beginning of our faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said; 'by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'.

Christian love has been described in the following way;

Silence; when your words would hurt.

Patience; when your neighbour is sharp.

Deafness; when the scandal flows.

Thoughtfulness; for another's woes.

Promptness; when duty calls.

Courage; when misfortune falls.

To love one another is a command from Jesus and something we are to do rather than think about to do. Christian love is not a shallow sentimental emotion that Christians try to work.; so that they can get along with one another. It is a matter of the will to choose to love someone, rather than an emotion. It is a matter of determining, of making up your mind that you will allow God's love to reach others through you; and then of acting toward them in loving ways.

A man was complaining to a missionary about missions in Africa. 'How can you go to Africa

and preach to those people about love when there is so much injustice in your own country', he demanded. The mission leader replied; 'we don't go in and preach to them about love. We go in and love them'.

But a word of warning and some clarification. Do not confuse Christian love with becoming a door mat for others to walk over and use. Christians are to have humility yes; but we should never be naive about those who would hurt us or seek to dominate us.

John distinguishes carefully later on between those who are deceivers who belong to the world and Christians who belong to the family of God. In Second John v 10 he explicitly states that such people are not to be welcomed into our lives.

This teaching requires reflection and discernment since, in the interests of mission, we are called to go into the world. But at the same time, we must be warned that the world holds dangers.

What are these dangers? There are **Intellectual dangers**, which lure us into patterns of thinking that rob us of the simplicity and reality of Jesus.

There are **Moral dangers**, lifestyles and attitudes that deal with everything from corrupt obsessions, to destructive views of sexuality. There are **Religious dangers**, charlatans, charismatic leaders who can out gun and out fox many a Christian minister. There are **Theological dangers**, ideas and ways that do not promote Jesus Christ, but rather promote doctrines and practices designed to deceive and manipulate. There are dangers everywhere and even though we should be generously open and loving, we must also be shrewdly discerning and wise.

When Jesus was sending the disciples out to proclaim the Kingdom of God he said this to them aware of those dangers;

'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men.' On this point by way of clarification I would say this. We are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves. As we do so many think that we should somehow leave our Christian teaching our Christian values, our Christian standards on the doorstep as we enter the house of our neighbour, or when we rub shoulders with them.

Jesus never forgot for one second who he was and why he came into the world. He did not water down his message or make it easier for people to accept. He maintained his true calling to a fallen world of many people, of many races, and many faiths. He mingled and mixed with all faiths and none yet remained true to who he was.

One of the ways today in which the church especially in the west in North America and Europe has been greatly weakened has been when the church and Christians have allowed other faiths, other trends, other minority groups, and other ideologies to take centre ground as it were. A bit like the cuckoo chick that pushes the other chicks out of the nest.

Loving others does Not mean that Christian values and the Christian faith somehow takes second place or becomes irrelevant. And that because of our love and acceptance of other races and other faiths they, then become dominant. Christians are not meant to be so subservient they abandon their faith thereby giving the impression they are then unloving. You can still love and hold firmly to the faith. Jesus told his disciples and he tells us to, 'stand firm'.

This requires discernment. Sadly, many Christian churches have keeled over in their pursuit to love the stranger in a wreckless manner, and in doing so have abandoned their love for Christ and his teachings. This attitude does not bode well for what it means to be a Christian.

Love for Christ, loving him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, must always come first in the life of a Christian. All other things come after. Jesus himself is the greatest example of this commandment. He says to us follow my example. Jesus illustrated love by the very life that he lived. He never showed hatred or malice. He hated all sin, deceit, malice, and disobedience. But he never hated the people who committed such sins.

He hated the sin, but not the person. I have heard Godly people say that there have been times where God has called them to love the unlovable. A person who really is despicable. They in themselves have been unable to do it until they realise that that person despite their terrible sin is made in the image of God. And that God so loved the world that he went to the cross for them. It's a sobering thought.

Christ's love was broad enough to include every person on this planet, because every person is a sinner. In Christ we have a new illustration of the old truth that God is love, and that the life of love is the life of joy and victory.

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The [photo](#) shows, "The Raising of Jairus' Daughter," by George Percy Jacomb-Hood, painted in 1895.

