

New Covenant Lifestyle: Lesson 5 – Obedience by Faith

If you have been a Christian for a while, you have undoubtedly heard the injunction that “you must obey God”. It is a statement that has been used to try to motivate people to live righteously, behave ethically and avoid “the pleasures of sin”. Unfortunately, the typical application of this statement has put people under the bondage of guilt and condemnation because it has focused on what we must do. We must exercise self-control to obey God by choosing to do what his laws say. Obedience has been made a work that we have to do to please God. Even the old hymn “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey” has put the focus on what we have to do. However, anything that relies on or requires our self performance is destined to fail and puts us under the ministry of death (**2 Corinthians 3:7**). So what is the New Covenant way of obeying God and how do we do it? The title of this lesson is the answer and living this way will set you free.

There are two main Greek words translated obey. An example of the first is in **Hebrews 5:9** where Jesus became the author of eternal salvation for those who obey him. Here the word obey is ‘hupakouo’ which means to listen attentively to in order to heed or conform. This tells us that obedience starts with changing how we think to agree with what God says (listen attentively) and that results in us living in what God says. An example of the second is in **James 3:3** where the bit in the horse’s mouth is used to get it to obey. Here the word obey is ‘pitho’ which means to convince, persuade, be content or yield.

Hupokouo is used where the subject is our obedience to God. Pitho is used where the subject is our obedience to the authorities in this natural world (magistrates, rulers, parents). So, it follows that obedience to God means listening attentively to His way of thinking and changing our thinking to agree with His. Under the New Covenant, God has guaranteed to change our thinking for us; our part is simply to embrace His thinking. Doing this causes our lifestyle to conform to His – that is called living in obedience to God. Obedience is not about using our own efforts to make our behavior righteous. It is letting the change in our thinking produce in us the same lifestyle as Jesus – I only do what I see my Father do and say what I hear my Father say. This is the outworking of faith.

Write out **Hebrews 5:9**: _____

What made Jesus perfect (**Hebrews 2:10 & 5:8**)? _____

What was this suffering (**Hebrews 2:18 & 5:7**)? _____

The context Hebrews chapter 2 through chapter 5 is the rest that God has for us. The writer uses the illustration of the people of Israel failing to enter into the Promised Land because of their unbelief. Because they did not listen attentively to (obey) what God said and let that become their way of thinking, but saw the natural status and chose to reject God’s direction, they ended up dying in the wilderness. Obedience to God is about believing what He says and making that how we live. That is called living by faith. Obedience to God is not a work of self-effort, it is resting in Jesus completed work and renewing our minds to think like God. Obedience is actually the outworking of faith in us. Since it activates obedience, let’s look at what faith is. The best description of faith is in **Hebrews 11**, which is known as the faith chapter or the “hall of faith”. The context of this chapter is introduced in **Hebrews 10:38**, where Paul re-iterates that “the just shall live by faith”, a prophecy from **Habakkuk 2:4**. Since every Christian has been made just (**Romans 3:24**), it follows that we live by faith which results in our obedience.

So what is faith? Write out **Hebrews 11:1**. _____

In this verse the Greek word translated substance is ‘hupostasis’ which means ‘under-girding’ or ‘supporting’ and the word for hope is ‘elpidzo’ which means ‘confident expectation’. Faith is the under-girding of your confident expectation in God – your expectation that He is working in you to will and to do of His good pleasure (**Philippians 2:13**). It is the New Covenant that undergirds your hope. Therefore, faith simply means you have total confidence that God is for you, has already provided the answers and that His power is working in you to fulfill His will – enabling you to live free from the curse that is in this world; to live in His good pleasure. Knowing that He is only good, means His good pleasure is an abundant, successful, restful, joyful life. Simply stated, ‘Faith is having a good opinion of God’. If there is any doubt that God is totally good or we are not totally convinced that He only wants the best for us, then we cannot have strong faith. We end up doubting that He will do what He says. So what convinces us that God is good? It is the reality of His love that was demonstrated in sending Jesus to redeem us. **Hebrews 11:1** further expounds on this when it says that faith is the “evidence (conviction, proof) of things not seen”. What is that proof – the New Covenant cut in Jesus body and sealed in his blood. Faith is total trust in the reality of God’s love and His consuming desire for your total wellbeing.

Unfortunately, man struggles with unbelief because of the curse in this natural world. God knew that and so He planned a way to remove our unbelief and make it possible for our limited faith to produce Jesus’ life in us. To understand how He did this, let’s look at a revelatory truth that Paul taught that will free your faith to blossom. According to **Galatians 2:16**, what cannot justify you? _____.

What does justify you? _____

Believing in Jesus results in you being justified by what? _____.

According to Galatians 2:20, who lives in you? _____

How do you live your life in the flesh? _____

These two verses state three times that we are saved by the faith of Jesus. Remember that salvation is a lot more than just being born again; it encompasses everything necessary for you to live free from the curse.

Romans 12:3 states “...God has dealt to every man the measure of faith.” If someone asked you to define what the measure of faith is, what would you answer? I put to you that it is Jesus’ faith. He came to earth with only His Father’s covenant promise that if He gave His life as payment for the curse, it would eradicate sin and enable God to redeem all mankind and deliver them from the curse. So Jesus came with only His Father’s word and did what God asked – that is living by faith. So Jesus accomplished his death and our redemption by His faith. His faith has delivered mankind from the curse. So, since Jesus is the measure of faith and He has been given to each of us, it follows that all we need to know about any challenge we face is that Jesus faith has already defeated it. Having enough faith for miracles is simply attaching our small faith to Jesus’ full measure of faith, which has already completed the miracle. That’s why Jesus answered the apostles’ request to “increase our faith” with “all you need is faith the size of a grain of mustard seed” (**Luke 17:5-6**). What was He saying? All we need is the small amount of faith that believes His faith is big enough for any circumstance and that His faith has provided the solution. This is how God made it easy for us to get rid of unbelief. Believing Jesus has already done it is much easier than thinking your faith has to be big enough to do it. The summary of this is that faith has two parts – our faith and Jesus faith. Knowing Jesus’ faith is big enough to handle any situation releases you from unbelief and allows Holy Spirit to have you declare what Jesus has already paid for. The result is “the sycamore

tree is plucked up and planted in the sea” (**Luke 17:6**). Obeying Holy Spirit becomes easy because your faith knows that Jesus faith has already completed the work.

Now read **Galatians 3:10-14** and answer the following questions

Who are under the curse (v10)? _____.

What cannot justify a man (v11)? _____.

How do the just live (v11)? _____.

Who redeemed you from the curse of the law (v13)? _____.

How did He redeem you (v13)? _____.

What comes upon you through Jesus (v14)? _____.

What promise do you receive (v14)? _____.

Now write out **Ephesians 2:8**. _____.

Notice how Paul clearly states that grace saved you through faith. Whose faith saves you? _____.

Our salvation continues every day because of Jesus’ faith. He accomplished his death by faith and in doing so delivered us from the curse. We get to receive God’s grace as a gift and it is this grace that makes salvation work in our lives. Living divinely healthy, provided for, protected and blessed is the result of God’s grace in our lives. When we attach our mustard seed size faith to Jesus’ huge faith, we enable grace to deliver us from the curse.

Back to **Hebrews 11**, the hall of faith. Having seen the two components of faith (our faith and Jesus faith), we now see this chapter in a totally different light. Observe that all the listed heroes have one thing in common; their testimony of faith was based in their blood covenant participation – i.e. looking forward to Jesus. Let me show you how this is seen in the first few testimonies. **Hebrews 11:4**, Abel offered a blood sacrifice and obtained righteousness (which was paid for by Jesus). **Hebrews 11:5-6**, Enoch pleased God, which can only mean that he believed in God’s redemption (looked forward to Jesus’ sacrifice). **Hebrews 11:7**, Noah prepared the ark, which is a type of Jesus, and saw salvation from the flood. **Hebrews 11:8-10**, Abraham followed God and saw the promised land because he had his eye on God’s city, the heavenly Jerusalem whose “temple” (center of it) and light is Almighty God and the Lamb (**Revelation 21:22-23**). **Hebrews 11:11-12**, Sarah received the Word of God and conceived by God’s power. **Hebrews 11:13** makes the clear statement that they were all looking forward to the promise. Jesus had yet to come and pay the price, but they attached their faith to what Jesus would do by his faith and God imputed righteousness to them. They all saw, believed and received the promise. Now that you have insight into what Hebrews 11 is all about; you can study the rest in your own time.

How does obedience result from faith? The first clause of the New Covenant is God’s guarantee to teach us His way of thinking and acting (**Hebrews 8:10**). It is Holy Spirit in us who guides us and teaches us and we choose to agree with what He says. This results in effortless obedience because we believe God (obedience by faith). God’s clearly stated plan for our lives is to conform us to the image of Jesus (**Romans 8:29**). He has already made us just like Jesus (**1 John 4:17b**). He has already given us Jesus’ mind – Jesus’ way of thinking, feeling and speaking (**1 Corinthians 2:16**). He has given us the fullness of Jesus (**Ephesians 4:7 & 13**). Our faith simply keeps our eyes on Jesus and His completed work and the result is we walk in obedience to Him. It is not a work that we do; it is resting in His grace and letting His power accomplish His plans for our lives.

True obedience to God is a product of faith, not a work of self effort. Performing miracles is simply a function of our mustard seed size faith in Jesus gigantic faith. This raises the question of can our faith grow (**2 Thessalonians 1:3**)? _____ . Since increased faith will produce greater obedience in us, how does faith grow?

Read **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12** and answer the following: What two things will God fulfill in us? _____

What causes Jesus to be glorified in us and us in him? _____ .

According to **Romans 5:17**, what must we receive to reign in life? _____

Faith grows as we receive grace – God’s divine favor. Increased favor comes from the growth of our vision of and intimacy with Jesus. The more we see Him and what His love has done for us, the larger we see His faith and the greater our faith becomes. Therefore, start actively receiving grace every day.

According to **Romans 4:20-25**, what was Abraham strong in (v20)? _____

What made him strong in faith (v21)? _____ .

Because of his faith, what was imputed to Abraham (v22)? _____ .

What gets the same imputation for you (v24)? _____ .

This theme continues into **Romans 5:1-2**. Here we see that believing in God (his love and provision) resulted in our justification (made us righteous). It brought us into peace (shalom – nothing missing, nothing broken) with God. What did this faith give us access to (v2)? _____ .

Obedience by faith comes from our intimacy and daily walk with Jesus. What derails our obedience and the associated ability to enjoy life is our self effort to obey. There is no striving in obedience; it is a lifestyle of love.

Paul, found this out in a trying situation he faced. Read **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**. What did Paul have an abundance of (v7)? _____

What came to buffet him (v7) _____ .

This means another person or people came against him. Today we would use the colloquialism of “pain in the neck” where Paul used “thorn in the flesh”. Satan was using people to come against Paul and the message he preached. How many times did Paul ask God to remove the messenger (v8)? _____

What was God’s response to Paul (v9) _____

Paul walked through this situation in obedience because of the grace God provided. Faith, grace and obedience all work together in our lives. Our faith in the work that Jesus completed by his faith is what activates God’s grace in our lives. When we live in the abundance of this grace, we delight in the leading and blessing of Holy Spirit, which causes us to walk in obedience. So powerful is this truth that the obedience walk is often done unconsciously; we do it because we are righteous and have our eyes fixed on Jesus and his love for us. Don’t live in bondage to the demand of obedience; live in grace and righteousness and you will be obedient by faith.