

THE OBEDIENT SON

By

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The first recorded word of Jesus were spoken at the age of 12 when His mother scolded Him for being in the temple instead of with the rest of the family. He said, “Know you not that I must be about my father’s business?” Jesus knew that He was the Son of God, and that He had a mission to accomplish, yet He claimed no rights or privileges because of His divine sonship. Instead, “He went down with them (His parents) and came to Nazareth; and he was subject unto them” (Luke 2:49–51).

Nothing more is written of Jesus until He began His ministry 18 years later. Scripture is silent about His life throughout those years, but He must have faced the usual challenges of youth: to experiment with forbidden activities, to question parental authority, to demonstrate independence and to gratify His own desires. It is written that He was tempted in all points as we are, and yet He was without sin (Heb. 4:15).

It is easily assumed by many that Jesus was able to resist temptation because He was God’s own Son, and therefore must have had special powers of resistance that the rest of us do not have. Were that the case, he could not have been tempted as we are. No, Jesus was “made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17) and, like the rest of us had to learn obedience: “Though he was a Son, yet (He) learned obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). He did not become the spotless Lamb of God by living a sheltered life, untouched by daily strife and peer pressure. He had to face the subtle and sometimes vicious attacks of the tempter and still remain morally pure in heart, mind, and body.

We are taught to follow His example “who did no sin” (I Peter 1:22). Of course, we have already miserably failed, and we can be ever so thankful that our hope of immortality does not depend on our perfect obedience, but upon His, and His death for our sins. *We are saved by God’s grace, not by our own performance.* It is just because we receive this marvelous grace that we desire to follow the example of our Savior.

This lead to the question of how Jesus was able to overcome temptation and to be obedient to the Father in all things.

ONE DESIRE: The Father’s will

At the age of twelve Jesus was concerned about His Father’s business. This concern never left Him. He said, “I do always the things that are pleasing to my heavenly Father” (John 8:29). To the disciples who were worried that he had not eaten, He said, “My meant is to do the will of him that sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). Jesus was motivated by one desire that was stronger than all others, the desire to please His Father.

James wrote that “each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). Each one desires to have his own way and to gratify himself. One may not commit murder, but delight in viewing it on television. He may not engage in adultery, but loves to think about it, read about it, and have it enacted before his eyes on the screen. For many it is only out of fear of the consequences that they are able to resist the sin.

Jesus was not motivated by fear, nor by self-interest. His chief delight was in pleasing His father, and at least twice, the record shows, the Father openly declared that He was well-pleased with His Son's performance (Matt. 3:17, 17:5).

Obedience did not just involve the necessity to do no wrong and resist evil. It was also positive, doing the hard things demanded. Even in submitting to death by crucifixion. Jesus had His mind fixed on pleasing God, praying, "not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42), as Isaiah had written, that it pleased Jehovah for Jesus to become an offering for sin (Isa. 53:10–11).

HUMILITY: Submission without shame

The rabbis of first century Judaism pictured the Messiah as a great warrior-king, like David, sweeping into Jerusalem with pomp and breath-taking splendor, and with military power taking vengeance on the hated Romans. They were offended by the appearance of this Messiah who turned the other cheek, who publicly announced, "I am meek and lowly in heart," and who chose the company of the poor and afflicted over that of the high and mighty. Modern religion is no different. Churches compete for the approval of the world and "clergymen" seek the chief seats in the eyes of man. Children are taught "self-esteem" rather than humility.

From His birth to His death Jesus was the perfect example of one who walked humbly before God, doing nothing to glorify Himself, but keenly aware of the need to glorify the Father. He scolded the Pharisees, saying, "How can you believe who receive glory one of another, and the glory that comes from the only God you seek not?" (John 5:44).

There is never a hint that Jesus considered the traditions of man, nor man's esteem, nor the fashion of the day, nor the demands of society, nor even His own personal pleasure or that of His loved ones, as having any weight against His obedience to the Father. It is only through humility that one can face degrading judgments and scorn by his peers without being intimidated.

We are taught to "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...(He humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5, 8).

The greater one's pride, the less likely he is to submit to God. It was pride that caused Adam and Eve to yield to Satan's challenge to eat of the forbidden tree and "be as God," so they would not need to obey Him (Gen. 3:5). Jesus humbled himself, that He might be an obedient Son.

FAITH: Trusting the Father

The temptation in the wilderness tested Jesus' faith in the Father and His written word. With each trial Jesus quoted that word with full confidence that it would prove true. In the Sermon on the Mount He made bold promises of what the Father would do for His children, promises that could not be made without supreme faith that God would fulfill His plan to cleanse the world of sin and bring believers to the ultimate joy of eternal life.

Just before calling Lazarus forth from the dead, Jesus demonstrated His faith by praying, "Father, I thank thee that thou has heard me. I knew that thou hear me always" (John 11:41–42). He could lay down His own life with total confidence that He would be

able to take it up again, saying, “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father” (John 10:18).

In the Revelation John describes a scene in heaven where no one was found worthy to open the book with seven seals. Then one of the elders said, “Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof.” It was Jesus, the Lamb, who took the book, and this was followed by songs of praise: “Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing” (Rev. 5:5, 1).

Jesus received heavenly praise, not because of His power to work miracles, nor because of His superior knowledge, nor because of His unique virgin birth, and not even because He was God’s only begotten Son, but because He had become “obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:8–9, Heb. 2:9–10). He won praise and glory because He had “overcome” all temptation and sin, then had laid down His life in obedience to the Father.

Forgiveness and eternal life are not rewards for righteousness, but are given by God’s grace. Since God has given His Son for us, it is our privilege — our joy, our meat — to respond as His obedient children.

The future is unknown. Much that we experience may not be readily understood. Our vocation is plain and simple: to love God and obey His word after the example of His obedient Son.

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