

Russell Kelfer

Four Things That Never Change

The Principles of Obedience

514-B

Series: Obedience

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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The Principles of Obedience

For the last three lessons we have been looking at Joshua 1 verses 8-9, which deals with the fact that “this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth.” In other words, we are to engrave the Word upon our lives in such a way that it is received readily and available for immediate use. That is, the Word should be on the tip of our tongue. I think that most of us concluded from the previous part of this study that this means to begin to memorize the Word.

For the last two lessons as we studied the rest of the verse, we came to the conclusion that we are supposed to meditate on the Word day and night. The reason we are supposed to meditate on the Word is not an end within itself either. We are to meditate on the Word continuously, day and night, for a specific reason: “that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.”

The Scripture then promises the Spirit-filled life. We are promised courage and strength. We are promised victory. We are told that no man shall be able to stand against us. We are promised prosperity and success. We are promised the presence of God. He will not leave us or depart from us. We are also told that the appropriation of those qualities comes from having the Word of God on the tip of our tongue as we meditate on it day and night so that we can be obeying it continually.

In the last two lessons, we dealt with the principle of meditation. It is seeing man’s characteristics in the light of the Scripture for the sake of being transformed into God’s character. We dealt with three areas of weakness which we meditated on. We looked at weariness, and saw how we can appropriate God’s strength. We looked at worry and began appropriating God’s peace. We looked at waywardness and meditated on God’s direction.

We dealt with the fact that there are at least four things we need to do to meditate on a passage of Scripture. We need to concentrate, evaluate, reiterate and appropriate.

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In the last lesson, we looked at the four basic areas or times in our daily walk that we need to meditate. We did a word study on meditation, and found four categories of time in the Scripture where we are told to meditate or when the Psalmist or others spent time in meditation. These were times of worship, times of study, times of spiritual warfare and times of decision-making.

By digging a little deeper, we found that there was a pattern that developed. When we looked at meditation, we were always admonished to worship or meditate on the worth of God. That is, we are to meditate on His person—who He is. When we are studying, we are admonished to meditate or consider the Word of God. We are to meditate on His promises—what He said. When we are in the midst of warfare, we are encouraged to consider His works. This means to meditate on His past performances—what He has done. When we are in times of decision making or when we need direction, we are encouraged to consider His ways. We are to meditate on His perspective. That is His plans, His purposes and His procedures. We are to think about the way He does things.

So we were asked to meditate on His worth, His Word, His works and His ways. We are to consider His person, His promises, His past performance and His perspective on a daily basis.

For this lesson, I want to go on to the hard part of the study: the reason we meditate. My favorite verse in Scripture is II Corinthians 3:18. In the Amplified Translation it reads like this:

And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit.

In other words, it says that spiritual growth is our goal. It's source is the Lord. It's power is the Spirit. It's agency is the Word. It's process is gradual. It's goal is to be changed into the very image of God. The procedure is to have the Word on your heart, meditate on it day and night and observe to do everything it says. In other words, just do it. It means that the goal of it all is changed lives. We are to gain this changed life through obedience to the will of God, which leads to appropriating the likeness of God.

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OBEDIENCE

First, this lesson deals with the subject of obedience. We are going to deal with it in five parts. The first part is the perspective of obedience. How does God look at obedience? What does He expect from us?

Second, we will look at the practicality of obedience. How does it work in real life?

Third, we will look at the performance of obedience. There are four characteristics we need to consider about obedience. We need to consider the immediacy of it, the completeness of it, the consistency of it and the joy of it.

Fourth, we are going to deal with the principles of obedience. We are going to do a word study from the Scripture. We are going to take the word “obedience” and “obey” and look up everything we can and see what principles and patterns emerge.

Last, we will look at the portraits of obedience. There are examples from the Word of men and women who chose to obey and those who chose not to obey the Word of God.

Let’s begin with the perspective of obedience. I have to admit to you that I became convicted while working on this study. This subject is difficult to study without becoming convicted. The goal of this class is to teach truth. I am basically apologetic by nature, and do need to apologize for my unfaithfulness to show forth the qualities I share in this class; but I don’t think I need to apologize for teaching the truth as it is in Scripture. What I will teach is strong meat, but I would encourage you to get out the catsup and get ready.

Let’s begin by defining obedience. *Obedience is responding to knowledge by following instruction.* Isn’t that what you want your children to do? Knowledge comes in three parts: commands, warnings and principles.

Let’s lay some general principles as foundations to our study on obedience. If obedience is responding to knowledge by following instructions, how does it apply when we are studying a given topic? Let’s take Joshua 1:8-9. You have been meditating on this passage. We become convicted during meditation not to be legalistic, but you personally, have been convicted that God intends for you to lay the Word of God on your heart. He

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wants you to meditate on it through the day. Let's suppose in the last three weeks you have come to this conviction, and you've gone home and meditated on the Scripture. What, then, is your response to be?

Most of us are quick starters and slow finishers or no finishers. Filled with good intentions, we begin every Sunday morning on a new project. It is whatever motivated us from the pulpit or from Sunday school or from a conversation with friends or from someone who has ministered to our life or from a book we read or a passage from the Word. We get motivated and excited. We decide from this point on this is going to be the will of God for our lives.

In this lesson, I want to deal with some basic principles about how God looks at obedience.

Principle 1- It is the perfect will of God for every Christian to be perfectly obedient to the will of God. You may be thinking, "You don't need to say that. That goes without saying." But what I want you to do is to concentrate on that in the light of some of these principles.

As an example, you may have heard a study on the tongue a year ago. Let's suppose you became convicted about giving a bad report. You meditated on Philippians 4:8. You realized that this is not what God wants you to do. But, did you do something about it? I want you to keep that in mind while we go through these principles.

Let's suppose that God has convicted you in recent months about lying. Maybe you were studying Proverbs 6:17 that the Lord hates a lying tongue. You realized that there are certain times that you didn't tell the truth. You didn't lie; you just twisted it. Proverbs 13:5 was a passage you were studying. It says that a righteous man should hate lying. You realized that you pretend to be a righteous man, that is you have the righteousness of Christ in you; but you can accept a little lie so long as nobody knows about it. Ephesians 4:25 may have convicted you. It says that we are to put away lying so that every man can speak truth to his neighbor. You recognize that the perfect will of God is that every Christian should not lie. Did you take your knowledge to the next step and begin obeying?

Let's take a few passages and try to take and solidify the

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principles concerning these convictions and how we are supposed to respond. Let's read I John 2:3-6 from the King James Version.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (I John 2:3-6)

In other words, one of the ways that we get the assurance of the presence of God in our lives is through our obedience. To say that we have a deep intimate knowledge of Him and fail to obey known truths makes us a liar. Turn to I Samuel 15:22.

And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.

(NKJV)

Ecclesiastes 12:13 is a summary of the preacher's argument. A lot of times you fall asleep or lose attention in the midst of a message. At the very end you perk up your head and try to pick up the conclusion of it all. The preacher comes to the conclusion of Ecclesiastes. If you have fallen asleep, listen.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.

(Ecclesiastes 12:13 NKJV)

James 1 says:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues

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in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

(James 1:22-25 NKJV)

In other words, if the Word has convicted you, you are to meditate or memorize from there, and you are not to lie again. These passages are telling us that God's goal for our lives is to get into the Word and stay there. We are to meditate on the Word for the purpose of application. Application must be followed through with obedience. This is the name of the game. This is the standard of God for our lives.

Principle 2– God judges how much you love Him by how much you obey of what you know from the Word. This principle builds on the first. God does not judge by your sacrifice as we just read. God does not judge by your labors, although He is appreciative of what you do. God does not judge you by your self-denial or by your spiritual accomplishments. The measuring stick of your love for God is found, first of all, in John 14. How many times do we go before the Lord and say, "Lord, I love You so much for what You have done for me."

He answers with this verse,

"If you love Me, keep My commandments."(John 14:15 NKJV)

We say, "Beg Your pardon?"

He answers, "If you love Me, just do what I say. Do what you know to do."

You say, "I don't know everything I need to know."

"Good, do what you do know." In John 14:21-23, Jesus begins by saying:

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (NKJV)

Jesus says, "We will live with him. We will grow with him."

Turn now to John 15 verses 10 and 14.

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“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”
(NKJV)

This is from the New Testament. So, if we do what we know to do, we shall remain in fellowship.

Turn now to I John 5:2-3.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. (NKJV)

His commandments are not burdensome. They are desirable.

God has not changed His standards. When we learn what the will of God is, we are supposed to do it. We are going to find later in this study that there are basically three levels of expectations in this world. There is the world’s standard. There is the church’s standard. There is God’s standard. I’m not talking about any church in particular, but the body of Christ as a whole. We compromise our standards rather than measuring up to the standards of God; but the standards of God are found in this book. This is the goal to which we are to be faithful.

Principle 3– God’s expectations are relative to our accountability. This principle builds on the first two. It means that the more you learn, the more obedient you are supposed to be. God’s expectation is relative to our accountability. The more you learn from the Word, the more accountable you are to be obedient to the Word.

Some of you say, “I’d rather be satisfied with my knowledge and let everybody know how intelligent I am in terms of Scriptural principles.”

This doesn’t satisfy the heart of God. Turn to James 4.

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17 NKJV)

Turn to Luke 12. We find the parable in which the Lord found the servant who was doing what he was told to do. He was elevated to a position of leadership. Look first at verse 45:

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“But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,

the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

(Luke 12:45-48 NKJV)

The relative punishment will be proportionate to the relative accountability. Some of us have been to seminar after seminar. We have had training with Christian organizations and have been taught from the pulpit as well as from study groups. Some of us have been Christians for many years. We have been given a wealth of knowledge from the Word over a period of years.

This passage tells us that God, in His love, is measuring His expected obedience in our lives relative to the truth we know. Instead of being so busy judging those around us for their lack of performance when they may have been exposed to a truth in a few given areas for a short period of time, God says that we ought to measure that log in our eye and recognize our responsibility to obey is far, far greater because we have been exposed to the truth much more.

Let’s suppose you have been to a Bill Gothard seminar four times, and let’s suppose some of the principles therein really met a need in your life. Let’s say you get up and teach a class or share with somebody the principles you learned about financial freedom, but in your own life there is still a series of compromises in that area. You say, “I’m working on it. God is pleased because I am further out of debt than I was four years ago when I first went to that seminar.”

But you are convicted that the Word says to owe no man anything except the debt of love. You know that your goal should be financial freedom. You say, “This month I only charged five

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things, and I will pay for two. Two years ago I would have charged everything in town. I'm making progress." This is not obedience. This is compromise. The question you need to ask yourself is am I obeying to the maximum?

You say, "I was convicted three weeks ago to memorize the Scripture." The first week after we did that lesson, I asked you to share a verse that we all were to memorize together. I think about a third of you did it. At least a third of you were convicted that it was a worthwhile goal for your life. I am asking how many of us were faithful to do this week what we were convicted of a few weeks ago to be the will of God? That is obedience. That is what the Scripture is all about. The more we obey, the greater the capacity we have to learn. The more capacity we have to learn, the greater the capacity we have to obey. The more we obey, the more Christ-like we become. Through that obedience, we see the person of Christ, and we are drawn to Him. That is Christianity.

It isn't the building up of continual knowledge so that we become spiritual eggheads. It is the building up of a life of obedience through the knowledge that we achieve. God judges our love for Him by the degree of our obedience. His expectation is relative to our accountability. Also, His expectation, as well, is relative to our responsibility.

Romans 2:17-24 and James 3:1 are passages that we can refer to regarding this matter. These two passages literally say that when God gives you responsibility or authority, He expects you to be more obedient. Let's look at the Romans passage.

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,

and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law,

and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?

You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God

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through breaking the law?

For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written. (Romans 2:17-24 NKJV)

Then James 3:1 is a familiar passage. We looked at it on our study of the tongue. In a paraphrase it says not to be in a hurry to be a teacher or an instructor or a leader in the church because there comes with that leadership a greater level of accountability. Read it in the Amplified or another translation, and you will get the picture clearly.

God’s expectation in our lives towards our obedience is based specifically on how much we know. Ask yourself how much you know. God is judging how much you love Him by how obedient you are to what you know.

Principle 4- We are accountable to become more accountable. This shoots down our other argument. Don’t just quit coming to church. Don’t quit studying the Word. I’ve heard people say that they are just going to go out and do what they know because until they do what they know to do they don’t want to learn anymore.

There are too many verses to share them all. James 4:6; II Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 2:6.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, (Colossians 2:6 NKJV)

Colossians 3:10 says:

and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, (NKJV)

I Peter 2:2 says:

as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, (NKJV)

II Timothy 2:15 says:

Study to show thyself approved unto God. (KJV)

The principle of Scripture is that we never have an excuse to stop learning. We simply have a requirement to pay attention to what we learn. I will give you some illustrations.

THE PRACTICALITY OF OBEDIENCE

The second part of our study is called the practicality of our obedience. Suppose that you are convicted by the passage that

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says *submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*. Let's say that you have a propensity to speed, that is, it is a natural thing for you to do. What are some reasons that you give yourself for breaking the law?

1- You don't think the law is fair.

2- You don't think anybody is going to find out.

3- The particular situation justifies it because you, being a Christian, are involved in God's work, and you have a lot of things to do.

None of these hold a candle in the light of Scripture.

Let's suppose that you come under that conviction as you meditate on the Word; it says to submit yourself to every ordinance of man. That means you are to obey stop signs, stop lights and speed limits. Let's suppose that you become convicted that this is sin, not because I said it or because somebody else said it, but because the Word said it. As a Christian, not only is your witness at stake, but also your fellowship with God will be affected when you knowingly disobey.

What does this mean in terms of practically obeying? The way I read it is:

1- God expects you to go 55 M.P.H., not 56 M.P.H. This means on the highway, not school zones. You say it takes a long time to get there. Catch a plane.

2- Not only is it the perfect will of God that we obey the speed limit, God is then looking at us and discerning how much we love Him by how faithful we are to obeying. When we go 60 M.P.H. in a 55 M.P.H., we are saying, "Lord, I love You, but not that much." This is what He says,

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.
(I John 2:3 NKJV)

What is His commandment? Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. I know this is a small example, but it is one that some of us can relate to. I'm going to start meddling in a minute.

Let's assume that this is a problem in your life. What we are actually saying is that every time you hear this, you become more accountable to obey it. Every time you hear it and disobey

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it, you are saying to the Lord, “I love You, but not that much.”

Also, you are accountable to become more accountable, so what you need to do is go home and study that passage again and try to wiggle out of it. If you can't, you are that much more accountable. The point is, why not just relax and obey to start with? Start driving 55 M.P.H. this morning as you leave church.

Let's suppose that you have a problem in the area of gossiping. You may say, “I know somebody who does. Let me tell you about them.” This is the way most of us think. “I don't gossip much.” You pick up the phone and someone really wants to know what someone else is up to. Men are just as bad as women, although we do it in a much more dignified way. We will meet each other in business transactions, and we will do it as we relate to principles in their lives. This is how men gossip. Women just get right down to the nitty gritty. They will tell you just what has been going on.

Let's suppose you have a problem with nagging your spouse. You are convinced through Scripture that this is sin. You are going to quit one of these days, but it is a lot of fun, and it produces results. The question is, every time you find this sin in the Scripture, God is looking at you to see if you love Him enough to quit.

Let's pretend that you are convicted in the area of giving. Maybe you are convicted that you are not giving as II Corinthians teaches from a heart that is filled with love. You are not a willing giver. You are not giving out of the abundance of your heart. You say, “One of these days when I make a fortune, I am going to really learn to give.”

The Scripture says that every time we read the concepts and principles of giving, which basically imply that we give out of what we have, not what we expect to get; we are judged according to the percentage that we understand of that principle. But if we go our way and still don't obey it, God is looking at that area in our lives. He is trying to see if we love Him enough to begin to turn loose and give Him control and trust Him.

Maybe you have a problem with whole-heartedness. You go to work, and you just can't get excited about being at work. Maybe you have a house to clean, and you just can't get excited about cleaning. You just cleaned yesterday, and it looks the same today as it did yesterday morning. There are different clothes piled

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up everywhere. There are different bottles left out. There are different glasses on the drain board, but the same basic pattern is there. It is tiring. So you just want to forget it all. The Lord says that whatever we do, we are to do it heartily as unto Him and not unto men. The question is, “Are you going to deal with yourself in obedience and begin to whole-heartedly respond to that situation?”

Maybe it is an area such as neatness or waste. Somebody asked me the other day why after all these years I had enough courage to lose a little weight. I said, “It is basically not that I am obedient. If I was obedient, I wouldn’t have been obese. The point is that I just don’t like to be obedient.”

The secret is that there was some self-denial involved. It takes something to jar us. About six months ago I sat down with my family. I watched my child as she was gorging and stuffing herself. We got her a placemat that said, “The Garbage Gobbler.” I was teasing her one day and said, “You’ve just got to stop eating so much. Why is it that you can’t quit?”

She said that she had been to Bill Gothard four times and learned the principle of the umbrella. She said that her umbrella had a hole in it.

Do you see the motivation it takes for most of us to obey at all? The point is that you and I do not normally obey simply because we are told to. When we were children, we normally did not obey just because our parent told us to. We asked them why. We asked them if we could just put it off for a while. We looked to see if anyone was looking. We tried to do as little as we could and still get by with it. Those patterns developed until now as adults we are treating our Heavenly Father just like we did our earthly parents. We say, “Lord, I’m going to do it, one of these days.”

In the next lesson, we are going to talk about the performance of obedience. There are four areas in which God tests our obedience.

- 1) How quickly do we respond?
- 2) How completely do we respond?
- 3) How continually do we respond?
- 4) What is our heart attitude when we do respond?

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In closing, what we memorize or lay on our hearts or study from the Word, we are supposed to have there for the purpose of meditating. Meditating is appropriating the principles of God for application. The reason we appropriate them is not so that we can share in a group that the Lord convicted us that we are to pay our bills. If we come back next week and someone asks, "Did you pay your bills?" You answer, "No, but boy did I get convicted." The point is that we are convicted for one single purpose: to obey.

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(06.03.15)