

#149 “Obedience Proves Our Love for God”

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Christianity is becoming really ethereal, touchy-feely, and abstract. For too many professing Christians, it seems that their relationship with God is dictated by how they feel towards God at the time or how they think God feels about them at the time. Closeness to God, according to this way of thinking and believing, is both subjective rather than objective and an experience rather than a reality. “I just feel so close to God today,” or “Can’t you just sense the Holy Spirit’s presence in the room?” become definers of one’s spiritual status rather than what the Bible says we should be concerned about. According to the Scripture, if we really want to know where we are at in terms of our relationship with God, we can forget about subjectivity and look at our own fruit. After all, a tree is known by its fruit (Matthew 7:20), not by what the tree thinks about itself or its relation to its Maker. God’s opinion is the only opinion that counts, and God knows the heart. And what comes out of the heart dictates fruit or the lack thereof. This is why Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). *His point is that we would forget about how close we think we might feel to God and to rather prove our love for Him by obeying what He has already said to us in His Word.* Obedience is how we prove our love for the Lord, and this is a very concrete, objective measure of the state of our relationship with God.

In Genesis 4, Cain and Abel both brought sacrifices to God. Abel took care of livestock, and he brought an offering of the firstlings of his animals. Cain worked the ground as a farmer, and he brought the produce he had grown as a sacrifice to God. God approved of Abel’s sacrifice but not Cain’s. The question that comes to our minds is why. Hebrews 11:4 says, “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.” So we know that Abel’s sacrifice was better because it was offered by faith. Was it better because it was animals instead of fruit? Perhaps God had given instructions to offer animals, and Cain disobeyed. Or, perhaps Cain brought some leftovers from his crop while Abel brought the best of his flock. Yet the answer to the why question is not directly answered in Scripture, which makes me think that it is the wrong question to ask. The point of Genesis 4 isn’t why God didn’t accept Cain’s sacrifice; rather, it is that Cain didn’t bring a sacrifice by faith as his brother Abel did. In other words, God was displeased with Cain because he disobeyed. The primary lesson of the account is that God wants us to obey by faith. If we love Him, we will walk by faith and obey, keeping His commands, as Abel did. Cain failed to obey, and his countenance fell (v. 7). Sadness is thus the result of disobedience, whereas obedience brings joy. This doesn’t mean obedience is easy, or Cain wouldn’t have struggled. But sin can be mastered (v. 7), and as we do so, we prove our love for God and gain confidence that we are walking closely with our Lord.

Saul also learned about obedience (1 Samuel 15). Samuel’s command to him was to conquer the Amalekites, kill their king, and destroy everything, from their livestock to all of their possessions. But Saul disobeyed and kept the king alive. He also brought back all

of the good things. When Samuel heard the bleating of the sheep, he confronted Saul about his disobedience. Saul's defense was that he brought the sheep to sacrifice to the Lord. However, he didn't do what God had said. Thus, Samuel said to him, "Has the LORD as much 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 divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king." When disobedience is called parallel words such as rebellion and insubordination, it seems like more of a severe offense against God. But it doesn't stop there. God likens disobedience to rejection, rebellion, iniquity, idolatry, and divination (witchcraft). In other words, despite Saul's cover story of wanting to sacrifice to God, in God's eyes, his actions made him just as bad as the Amalekites, people of idolatry, rebellion, iniquity and divination. God wasn't interested in Saul's religious gesture of sacrifice because He would rather have obedience. Obedience is better than sacrifice- just ask Cain.

Obedience is a simple proposition to understand, though a very difficult one to carry out. Thankfully, we serve a God Who is faithful to strengthen us to do His will as we put our trust in Him. The more we do so, the greater will be our endurance, character, and hope. Hope implies confidence and a surety that God is pleased and near (James 4:8). Do you want to feel closer to God? Obey and believe.