

Luke 22:39-44

1 Peter 5:5-9

Overview:

The Renewal of Obedience

We are called into obedience towards God but sometimes we fail to remember the motivation. Is it out of fear of damnation or out of tradition? Or maybe out of an expectation of reward? Yes, to all of these but the most important motivator is as a response of God's love. We see this played out perfectly in the Garden conversation between Jesus and his Father.

Lesson:

We are called into obedience to God for many reasons but the most important one, the one that drives all other reasons, is out of response to God's love. It is for this reason that we obey and for this reason that all of the other reasons make sense.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

"Eat your vegetables."

"Why?"

"Because they are good for you."

"Why?"

"Because they are healthy."

"Why?"

"Because that's how God made them."

"Why?"

"Because. Now, eat your vegetables."

If you are or have been the proud parents of a "why year old" this conversation is very familiar to you and has tried your patience on multiple occasions. Never ending, the same question repeats until you can successfully distract them with something else.

Now, maybe your children have grown out of this stage or you haven't been blessed with this experience before – fear not! If you work in a large corporate environment, you have probably fallen victim to something very similar. Managers are taught "The 5 Whys Technique" as an effective method of uncovering the root cause of any situation. If any of you use this method then I apologize up front, but it sounds very similar to the conversation I just shared with you. They are taught to ask "why" 5 times with the promise of identifying the single, most important cause to any problem.

So, for those of you that fall into neither camp and are reflecting on how blessed you must be, I have a great treat for you! Tonight, we are going to ask our own “why” questions.

Our readings focus on the obedience of Jesus and of our own expected obedience to God. Besides these two passages, there are many others in the Old and New Testaments that command us to obey God and avoid what He forbids. We are shown examples, like this one tonight, of what perfect obedience looks like, and we are instructed to follow His example.

That message seems obvious and straight forward, but I have a question:

“Why?”

Why *should* we obey God? Or, better yet, why *do* we obey God? Have you ever thought about that? Let me give you a factious illustration that I didn’t make up:

What if I commanded you to walk three hundred miles to a certain bank and there you would receive three billion dollars? As the days passed would you ever forget *why* you were walking? Would you ever reply: “I have no idea why I’m walking to the bank, but I was commanded to do so, and so here I blindly walk?” Of course not! You would never forget your motivation for your obedience. But what if you *did* forget? Would you still continue to walk? Of course not. That makes no sense. There *must* be some motivation, some reason to follow my command.

And so, too we should always understand the motivation when we talk anything about God. Why do we read the Bible? Why are we to love our neighbors? Why do we pray? What value can be realized from these activities without a clear understanding of their underlying reasons? I believe that very little, if any so tonight I’d like to ask these “Why” questions for obedience. There are many motivators recorded throughout the Bible that we can choose from, but I’d like to speak to only a few of them that tend to drive us faster towards the root of the answer.

The first one is the command: God calls us to be obedient. “You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always” it says in Deuteronomy (11:1). God created us in His image and calls us to obedience unto Him. It is a command that has been constant since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve were called into an obedient relationship with God in the Garden of Eden. “Eat from any tree in the garden,” God said, “but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Reminders to this command are recorded throughout the Old and New Testaments: from Adam, to Moses, through the Judges, the Kings, and to Jesus Himself. Even today that command continues as God expects us to be obedient to Him, and Him alone.

But Why?

Because we are promised a reward. Obey and be rewarded, God says. And, not just in heaven but also on earth.

“Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you,” God tells Moses, “so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.” (Deuteronomy 5:33)

True obedience includes the expectation of something in return. We see it in our own professional lives and in the lives of our children. Think back to the time your children were very young. Was there ever a time that your requirement for obedience didn't include a reward? Of course not! It always did. Sometimes the reward was simply being able to continue breathing – but there was *always* an award attached.

Children are promised long life on earth for obeying their parents. In the OT the Israeli slaves were promised freedom from Egypt's Pharaoh for obedience during the first Passover. But, even greater than that, are God's rewards of himself:

- God promises that he will reveal himself to us (John 14:21),
- that he will dwell with us (John 14:23),
- that His joy will remain in each of us (John 15:10-11),
- and that our prayers will be answered (1 John 3:22).

Many of us could stop at this point and be satisfied with the answers to why we are to be obedient to God, but not me. For the third time tonight, I ask “why.”

If we are commanded by God and promised great rewards, why do we continue to sin?

Because original sin has placed our nature in direct conflict toward God's Gospel and Law and makes us hostile towards Him. Paul writes in Romans that “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Don't miss the message in this passage. Not only does our sinful flesh actively rebel against God in active obedience, it *cannot even change its own condition*; it cannot, by itself, turn towards God but instead tries to flee. And it is only through the workings of the Holy Spirit in us that we realize this adversarial nature and even *attempt* obedience – however meager it may be.

And so we view our lives through the lens of God's Law and find that we fall short, and the longer we examine our failures the more pressure the Law places on us: heavier and more intense it grows until we reach the point where it promises to crush us - and it is at this point where we find the power in Christ's perfect obedience.

But, why?

First, God is Holy and demands that people be and remain holy. To meet this demand of God, it was necessary for us to keep the law perfectly and we could not do that. So, to satisfy these demands of God's Law and make good our shortcomings, the Son of God became man. He became our substitute under the Law so He could keep and fulfill them in our place.

Secondly, because no sin is forgiven unless it is atoned for and full satisfaction is made by suffering the penalty, Christ took our place. By His precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, He fully atoned for the sin of all people.

And so, we obey God because it proves our love to Him.

John writes

²This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

We can never fully comprehend the work that was finished on the cross or the suffering that Christ experienced for our sake, but through the power of the Holy Spirit we are comforted with the knowledge and understanding that because of this suffering the rewards have been imputed onto us and so we respond through our own obedience. We fail, often, but we continue in our attempt to be that holy person that God sees us to be through His Son, and we do it to show our love to Him.

And this leads us to the final “why” question.

We obey God out of response and worship to His love for us.

This is the root of obedience. We obey because He first loved us.

Jesus practiced perfect obedience. He humbled himself by becoming human. God the Creator became God the creature. Jesus gave up the holiness of heaven for the burden of this world. He obeyed the law of love without a mistake. And in perfect obedience to His Father’s plan, He laid down His perfect life as a sacrifice on the cross. Jesus was horrified at the thought of having his skin lashed open and having nails driven into His body and so he prayed in agony, “Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.” And then He walked right into that suffering.

This is the obedience that saves you and offers redemption, not because of your obedience, but because of His obedience. His perfect life, sacrificed on the cross and raised again, will cover the debt of your sin.

Let’s pray.

God, tonight as we near the climax of Lent and move every closer to the cross of perfect obedience and salvation, we renew our obedience to you. We recognize that we have fallen short of your expectations, that we have failed countless times to follow your command. We acknowledge that we deny you your rightful place in our hearts and lives. But in our renewed obedience to you we travel to the cross. With the power of the Holy Spirit we make our way to that cross of Christ and the sacrifice that followed from perfect obedience to the you. We humble ourselves and fall to our knees in repentance and tonight we renew our commitment to obey you as a response to your love for us. Forgive us for our disobedience and show mercy on us.

Amen.