

DEUTERONOMY 5:32, 33; 6:24, 25

OBEDIENCE VERSUS THE WISDOM OF THIS AGE

“You shall be careful ... to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.”

“The LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.”¹

The Master has established a standard for all who are called by His Name. This standard may be stated in Christ’s words, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” [JOHN 14:15]. One must wonder whether many among the churches are prepared to apply this biblical standard to life. We say we love God because we give him a few moments of our busy lives—singing repetitious songs in a desultory fashion, enduring a brief lecture about some pious issue or another and reciting prayers that we have committed to memory. Or we say we love God because we fling a hurried request for a non-specific blessing on the food we eat (provided we are not too embarrassed by the presence of strangers). However, the Word of God makes it very clear that the love of a believer is gauged by obedience to the will of the Lord!

The message is a call for all who call themselves by the Name of the Son of God to ensure their obedience to Him. If we are disobedient, we must prepare ourselves for divine discipline or acknowledge that we have never known Him. It is high time that we divested ourselves of every excuse and again sought the will of the Master expressed through our lives.

THE WILL OF GOD — People, especially immature Christians, spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about the will of the Lord. Young men and women are often perplexed, asking what the will of God is for their lives, or asking whom the Lord would will them to marry. Let me make a few general observations about the will of God.

First, God does have a will. There are not multiple wills (a separate will for each of us) as some imagine, but the will of the Lord is revealed clearly in His Word. Let me say in the broadest sense that we focus so much on the aspect of finding God’s specific will as if our lives were fully plotted for us—as if should we fail to discover the secret will of God we will have to settle for God’s second best. Such thinking ignores the evidence of the Word.

We are saved so that we might be free. This truth becomes evident when we remember the glorious dictum, “For freedom Christ has set us free” [GALATIANS 5:1]. If we are free, then, we should not permit ourselves to become enslaved to rules and regulations created by mere mortals. Neither should we be enslaved to the expectations either of other believers or of outsiders. Assuredly, we must not permit ourselves to be enslaved to our own passions. Certainly, we do not wish to be provocative toward outsiders or to deliberately injure the spirit of those who are weaker in the Faith; nevertheless, we were called to freedom [see GALATIANS 5:13]. This freedom is not freedom to do as we wish; rather, it is freedom to lovingly serve one another.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Having emphasised the freedom we are to enjoy, we must not imagine that God maps out each step of our life. For instance, you are free to marry whom you will, so long as the marriage is in the Lord [see 1 CORINTHIANS 7:39; 2 CORINTHIANS 6:14]. As a Christian, you are not free to marry outside the Faith; if you do so, you may anticipate trouble. You are free to pursue any occupation or profession that you desire, bearing in mind that “whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” [COLOSSIANS 3:23; see also COLOSSIANS 3:17 and 1 CORINTHIANS 10:31]. You may live where you will, though I caution that you should avoid living in Sodom, unless you were sent there by the Lord to warn the inhabitants—even then, move with fear and trembling. You have been given freedom, and God does not narrowly restrict your steps.

Having said this, I return to the point that God’s will is revealed in the Word. Because we call Jesus our Master, we are responsible to treat Him as Master, proving obedient to what He commands. Let’s establish the importance of knowing and doing the will of God. It is important to realise that doing the will of God marks you as belonging to Him, and belonging to Him assures eternal life. This is the import of the words John writes in his first letter, when he states, “The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does *the will of God* abides forever” [1 JOHN 2:17]. Moreover, doing the will of God reveals our relationship to the Master. Jesus said, “Whoever does *the will of God*, he is my brother and sister and mother” [MARK 3:35].

We pray, and we frequently conclude our prayers by reciting the formula, “In Jesus’ Name.” In effect, we are stating that we are praying according to the will of the Master. However, when we are brutally honest, we confess that we do not know how we should pray. Fortunately, Christ serves as our Great Advocate before the Father [1 JOHN 2:1]. Also, it is vital to note that the Spirit of God dwells in the life of each believer. Among the multiple tasks performed by God’s Spirit living in us, is His intercession on our behalf. Paul teaches us that “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints *according to the will of God*” [ROMANS 8:26, 27]. So, even if we say that we do not know the will of God, the Spirit who lives within knows the will of God and intercedes according to the divine will!

It is evident that we can know what the will of God is. What else can Paul’s words mean when he writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is *the will of God*, what is good and acceptable and perfect” [ROMANS 12:2]. It should be obvious from what preceded this verse that the will of God is expressed through presenting our “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship” [ROMANS 12:1]. Underscore in your mind that the will of God is “what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Thus, the will of God in your life is expressed through presenting your body as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”

Let’s focus on how we can be holy and acceptable to God. If we know the will of God, and if we anticipate doing the will of God, we will be endeavour to live a holy life in the presence of God. In this vein, I can state categorically that your holiness is the will of God. Listen to the words of the Apostle, “*This is the will of God, YOUR SANCTIFICATION*: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-8].

Clearly, the will of God is that you should be holy. Sexual immorality—licentious acts, salacious images and thoughts, suggestive language, viewing pornography and all such things—are out of the will of God. You were called to purity; live as free people. If you live a pure and holy life, you will also learn to “give thanks in all circumstances,” for you know that this, also, “is *the will of God in Christ Jesus* for you” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:18].

I also learn that **STANDING UP UNDER THE TRIALS OF LIFE** is the will of God. Listen to a passage found in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done *the will of God* you may receive what is promised. For,

‘Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.’”

[HEBREWS 10:32-38]

It should be obvious that turning aside from following the Master displeases God; such cowardice cannot be the will of God. Endurance is clearly within the will of God.

These two instances of the will of God—maintaining sexual purity and enduring opposition—are united in a passage that Peter pens in his first letter. “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for *the will of God*. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” [1 PETER 4:1-5]. **WE ARE TO AVOID LIVING AS THE WORLD LIVES AND WE ARE TO INURE OURSELVES TO HARDSHIP**, for this is the will of God.

In making the following tough statement I seek neither to injure nor offend, though I do not doubt that some will feel hurt and others will be offended. However, I love you enough to speak plainly, challenging you and stirring up your sincere minds by way of reminder. Among professing Christians today, it would appear that the majority are best identified as cultural Christians. They self-identify as Christians, even while tolerating immorality because to not do so would embarrass their friends, their children or their colleagues. They wish to live as the world lives without distinguishing themselves as pure or holy. They are quiescent in the face of opposition to the Faith, treasuring the possessions of this life more than the approval of Holy God. The hope for continuation of the Faith in Canada lies not in occasional noisy marches or in crowds gathering to sway hypnotically while singing choruses before returning to the spiritual senescence that previously marked their lives—the hope of the Faith is godly men and women who quietly do good, persistently and prayerfully seeking the souls of lost men and women, even as they fear sin far more than they fear the disapproval of the world about them.

This is demonstrated by the instructions Peter gives in his first letter. Listen to his words. “***This is the will of God***, that BY DOING GOOD YOU SHOULD PUT TO SILENCE THE IGNORANCE OF FOOLISH PEOPLE.” The Apostle then provides specific ways in which we can do good. “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor” [1 PETER 2:15-17]. He continues by pointing to honesty and righteousness in the workplace, by enduring opposition for the sake of the Master, by wives showing a submissive spirit to their husbands, and by husbands treating their wives in an understanding way [see 1 PETER 2:18-3:7]. Finally, doing good requires that we seek unity within the congregation of the Lord [see 1 PETER 3:8] and that we avoid retaliation when our feelings are hurt [see 1 PETER 3:9-12].

We can be confident in the knowledge that the will of the Lord is that EACH OF US COMMIT OURSELVES TO THE CONGREGATION WHERE HIS SPIRIT HAS PLACED US and that we commit ourselves to perform the tasks that He assigns. Paul commended the Macedonian Christians because “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then ***by the will of God***” to the preachers who brought them the Word [see 2 CORINTHIANS 8:5]. It should be obvious that we are to commit ourselves to the preaching of the Word, seeking out those who declare that truth without adulteration or equivocation. The first Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” [ACTS 2:42].

Moreover, we can be assured that it is God’s will that we EXERCISE THE GIFTS WE RECEIVED FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BUILD THE BODY to which He appoints us and to glorify God. Notice how Paul makes a point of stating repeatedly that He was not simply functioning as an apostle because he wanted to do something. Rather, we read such statements as, “Paul, ***called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus***” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:1]. This formula is repeated throughout his letters [see, e.g., 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1 and 2 TIMOTHY 1:1].

These instances in which the will of God has been recorded are incontestable. For all who live this side of the cross, God expects those who confess His Name to openly identify with Him and to place their lives within the assembly where His Spirit has placed them. The Word of God anticipates that those who believe will identify as followers of the Lord. Throughout the pages of the New Testament, there is no such thing as an unbaptized believer; immediately upon believing, they are baptised. Moreover, there is not one instance of anyone being baptised in order to become a believer; rather, the model we have received is believe and then be baptised.

This is evident in the formula we know as the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. Notice the flow: make disciples, baptise and teach. Today, we want to change this to teach, baptise and then disciple. Why else do people baptise their infants if not to make them Christians? Regardless of the specific teaching and protestations of the sect that baptises infants, in the mind of parents presenting their children for baptism the purpose clearly is to make them Christians—to save them! As a significant aside, we are to make disciples—not Christians!

We are given the account of the conversion of an official of the Ethiopian court. The Spirit of God intervened in a revival meeting that Philip was conducting, impelling him to travel into the desert. There, he met a man who served in the court of the Queen of Ethiopia, though he was strangely drawn to worship the True and Living God at the Temple in Jerusalem. Motivated by the Holy Spirit, Philip approaches him and was enabled by the Spirit to instruct this man in righteousness and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Approaching a wadi, the official requested baptism, and on the basis of his faith, he was baptised.

Listen to the divine account. “The eunuch replied to Philip, ‘I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or another person?’ So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.

“As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, ‘Look, there’s water! What would keep me from being baptized?’ [And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’] Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way rejoicing” [ACTS 8:34-39 HCSB].¹

The eunuch believes and is then baptised. Doctor Luke is quite specific to note that Philip and the eunuch “went down into the water,” and “they came up out of the water.” In other words, he was immersed in order to picture the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His baptism was a picture of what the Master had done for him and what had happened in his own life. This is in keeping with the teaching of the Master [see MATTHEW 3:13-16; JOHN 3:23], and also with the extended teaching of the apostle [ROMANS 6:1-11; COLOSSIANS 3:12].

Then, those who confess through baptism are to openly unite with the congregation where the Spirit of God settles them [ACTS 2:41], submitting themselves to the oversight of the elders of that assembly [HEBREWS 13:17], investing their lives in that congregation, and sharing in the mutual accountability that results in building up that particular Body of Christ! This is the import of Paul’s admonition to Christians, “Strive to excel in building up” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:12], and again, “Let all things be done for building up” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:26].

It is obvious that the will of the Father is that those who believe are to be baptised. Moreover, it should be apparent that baptism which fails to picture death, burial and resurrection (of the Master and the death of the believers’ old nature which is supplanted by a new nature) is no baptism at all. Because this is true, how is it that so many people are disobedient to the will of God? How can so many substitute their supposition for the clear teaching of the Word of God? Surely it is nothing less than a mark of our rebellion.

All that has been said to this point is by way of review. The purpose of this review was to provide a general perspective so that we can discover what is communicated through the text. And it is to the text that I now invite you to turn your attention.

OBEDIENCE EXPRESSES LOVE — The bifurcated text provides application for the Ten Words. Moses had just iterated the Ten Commandments [DEUTERONOMY 5:6-21], reminding God’s people of the conditions that apply once that divine Law was given. The one great condition was that they were to obey God!

The Law revealed His will that they live separated lives that marked them as His people. The people of God belong to the Living God. Did you note that final verse of our text? “It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us” [DEUTERONOMY 6:25]. Obedience to the commandments of the LORD God marked the people as belonging to Him and revealed their righteousness.

Would you be surprised if I were to say that just as Israel was to obey the LORD God, so those who are called by the Name of the Son of God are responsible to know what He commands and to do all that He commands? As Jesus was preparing His disciples for His exodus, His teaching grew in intensity. Certainly, He taught them many things; but one truth was emphasised repeatedly—the need for obedience to all that He commanded.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” [JOHN 14:15]. Obedience is equated with love for the Master. There can be no equivocating, no dissenting, no dodging the import of what He said. To ensure that these followers understood the significant and the importance of obedience, He again said, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” [JOHN 14:21]. Then, almost immediately, the Master again said, “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” [JOHN 14:23]. Only a few moments, perhaps less than a minute later, Jesus again stressed this self-same truth when He warned, “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” [JOHN 15:10].

Think about that. In the space of a minute or less, the Master brought to the fore the necessity of obedience at least four times. The disciples were confronted with the truth that those who love Jesus are obedient to Him. It does no harm to His intent to point out that disobedience cannot be equated to love. Acting in ignorance demonstrates neither love nor hate; however, when we know what is right, we will do what is right—if we love the Master!

John apparently got the message, for in his first and second letters, he stresses this truth: “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” [1 JOHN 5:3]. Again, John wrote, “This is love, that we walk according to his commandments” [2 JOHN 6]. Early in his first letter, John makes the case with exceptional candour when he pens these words, “By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” [1 JOHN 2:3-6]. John uses this truth as a theme woven throughout his letters which are included in the canon of Scripture. Establish in your mind that love and obedience cannot be separated.

Let me apply this concept to a few instances that are too frequently ignored in this day. First, there is the matter of identification with the Master. As we have already seen, the Master commanded that those who believed in Him were to identify through the act of baptism. According to the command given believers at the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel, baptism is the identifying mark of those who initiate the discipleship process. They are not baptised in order to become disciples, but they are baptised because they are disciples. Of necessity, this excludes the baptism of infants, reserving the rite until an individual has been born from above.

Reading through the account of the early churches it becomes obvious that baptism was administered immediately to those who received Jesus as Master over their lives. Moreover, baptism was administered as a mark of their submission to Christ as Master over their lives and not in order to make them believers. For instance, note that following the preaching delivered on the Day of Pentecost, “Those who received [Peter’s] word were baptised” [ACTS 2:41]. The Jewish listeners who believed were baptised immediately, and those who received baptism were enrolled in an entity. The proper understanding is that these who were baptised were added to the church. Listen to the divine account. “Those who believed what Peter said were baptised and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all” [ACTS 2:41 NLT].ⁱⁱ

When they asked what they should do in response to His preaching, Peter had said, “Have a change of mind, that change of mind being accompanied by abhorrence of and sorrow for your deed, and let each one of you be baptized upon the ground of your confession of belief in the sum total of all that Jesus Christ is in His glorious Person, this baptismal testimony being in relation to the fact that your sins have been put away” [ACTS 2:28 WUEST].ⁱⁱⁱ

The language of this translation is perhaps cumbersome—it is undoubtedly quite wooden, but the purpose of Dr. Wuest’s translation was to provide his readers with a thorough understanding of what was communicated by the underlying Greek so that no one would misunderstand what was said. When Peter said to his listeners, “Be baptised,” the words were not concessive, but rather imperative. He stated an absolute requirement for those confessing Jesus as Messiah. Peter commanded baptism as the outward and visible sign of repentance; a demand that occasioned no obvious surprise among those listening that day.²

Today, our churches devise membership classes and well meaning, though apparently untaught believers, attempt to do the work of the Holy Spirit by “testing” those who profess faith in the Son of God. Then, if these converts should fall into error, because we have done our work, we ignore them. The New Testament method is to receive all who confess Christ as Lord, immediately initiating them into the Faith through baptism, and thereafter holding one another accountable for faith and practise! We seem to imagine that we have created a better way; but we must admit that we are disobedient, and especially if we know better and refuse to do better.

In Samaria, when Deacon Philip “preached Good News about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ,” many believed and were immediately baptised [ACTS 8:12, 13]. The Ethiopian official to whom he preached was baptised immediately upon believing that Jesus was the Messiah [ACTS 8:36-38]. As soon as Saul believed, he was baptised [ACTS 9:17, 18]. Cornelius and the other Gentiles gathered in his home were baptised immediately after they confessed belief in Peter’s message [ACTS 10:46-48]. Lydia and those of her household who believed as she did were baptised immediately when she confessed faith in the Christ [ACTS 16:15]. Likewise, the jailer in that city was baptised together with all who believed in his family the very evening in which they believed [ACTS 16:30-33]. In Corinth, Crispus, the synagogue ruler, together with all who believed in his household were baptised when they believed [ACTS 18:8]. The disciples of John, when they heard the message of truth, believed and were immediately baptised [ACTS 19:5].

To all who are yet disobedient in this matter of baptism, with Ananias I am compelled to ask, “Why do you wait? Rise and be baptised” [see ACTS 22:16]. What excuse can you give for your disobedience in failing to openly identify with Christ and to unite with the congregation where the Spirit of God has placed you? Will your practise be dictated by the opinion of family or friends, or will be obey the Word of the Lord?

We also have a commandment from the Master that we are to love one another. Preparing His disciples for His departure, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” [JOHN 13:34, 35]. Christians are responsible to “love one earnestly from a pure heart” [1 PETER 1:22]. Too often our love consists of nothing more than a casual acquaintance that is occasionally renewed through sitting in the same room singing choruses and nodding off in unison under the drone of a unenthusiastic preacher. Where is the love that impels us to intervene when a believer is harming herself? Where is the love that dares confront wickedness in the self-centred believer? Where is the love that holds professed saints accountable for their actions rather than making concessions to their disobedience?

² For a fuller discussion, see F. F. Bruce, **The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1988) 69-70; Richard N. Longenecker in Frank E. Gaebelein (ed), **The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts** (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 1981) 283; and Ben Witherington III, **The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1998) 154-155

I have spoken broadly. No doubt, there are many churches that still hold the line on the Faith. However, I question whether they are any longer in the majority in our world. As I prepared the message, I read a news item from the religious press. It related the loving rebuke of Archpriest Siahei Hardun of the Orthodox Church of Belarus presented to the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Archpriest was present as an oecumenical advisory delegate to thank the assembly for the assistance provided by the PCUSA after the fall of the old Soviet empire.

Hardun recounted how the churches in Belarus suffered severe persecution under communism—church buildings were destroyed, seminaries were closed and social ministries were forbidden. Today, with help from the PCUSA, the Faith in Belarus is recovering lost ground and new churches are being built rapidly.

It was after this that the Archpriest ceased complimenting the assembly and confronted what can only be seen as grievous sin. I quote from the news account, “‘I was really struck while listening to your discussion about homosexuality, same-sex marriage, civil unions and other moral issues,’ Hardun said. ‘Christian morality is as old as Christianity itself. It doesn’t need to be invented now. Those attempts to invent new morality look for me like attempts to invent a new religion—a sort of modern paganism.

“‘When people say that they are led and guided by the Holy Spirit to do it, I wonder if it is the same Spirit that inspired the Bible, if it is the same Holy Spirit that inspires the Holy Orthodox Church not to change anything doctrinal or moral standards?’ Hardun said. ‘It is (*sic*) really the same Spirit or perhaps there are different spirits acting in different denominations and inspiring them to develop in different directions and create different theologies and different morals?’

“‘My desire is that all Christians should contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints, as St. Jude calls us to do. And my advice as an ecumenical advisory delegate is the following: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”’”³

This brave man demonstrated the depth of his love by daring to confront this assembly to call them to righteousness as God expects of those who are called by His Name. He called them to obey the revealed will of God, rejecting the wisdom of this dying age.

Israel was commanded to love God supremely: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” [DEUTERONOMY 6:4-6]. This command was never rescinded; rather it was restated for Christians when the Master identified this as the most important of all commandments. Jesus said, “The most important [commandment] is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’” [MARK 12:29, 30]. Love is not loving without obedience.

OBEDIENCE MUST BE TAUGHT — Obedience, like love, does not just happen; it must be taught to each succeeding generation. Throughout the portion of the Word that serves as the focus for our meditation this day the concept is repeated that each generation is responsible to teach succeeding generations so that there would be a continuation of the knowledge of the will of the Lord, and so that they would obey all that the Lord commanded. Love for the LORD would not be automatic, obedience would not just happen; it would be necessary to teach love for God.

³ Erin Roach, “Priest urges PCUSA toward orthodoxy; prayer banned at high court?”, Baptist Press, 30 July 2010, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=33442>, accessed 30 July 2010

Take special note of Moses' emphasis on the necessity of teaching the children. Continuing in the passage referred to moments ago, we see the old man saying of the commandments the people were to obey, "These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" [DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9].

The latter portion of our text points to the fact that we have an opportunity and a responsibility. When people witness believers at worship, they ask, "What is the meaning of this?" So it is that God prepares His people by saying, "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us'" [DEUTERONOMY 6:20-25].

In this instance, Moses envisioned that children would observe their parents worshipping and would ask the meaning of what their parents were doing. I have witnessed precisely that so very often as children ask their parents what they are doing as they observe the Lord's Table or as they heed the preaching of the Word.

When Peter instructs believers to be "prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you" [1 PETER 3:15], he presents a scenario that is probable. If you live in the light of the presence of the Son of God, people will wonder what is happening in your life. If you live as though Christ is alive, presenting a vibrant testimony of His love and mercy, people will ask why you live as you do!

This is quite similar to the proposition Paul presents to the Corinthians Christians when he writes, "If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" [1 CORINTHIANS 14:24, 25].

Outsiders observing us at worship will be naturally curious. Undoubtedly there are some who imagine that their agnosticism demonstrates superior intellect, and many cultural Christians do not want to do anything that will possibly offend outsiders, so they do nothing; but among lost people who observe the people of God at worship will always be some who are drawn by the Spirit of God to consider the message of the Master. They will ask what we are doing and ask for a reason for the hope that is in us. And when they ask, we must give them an answer, doing so "with gentleness and respect" [1 PETER 3:15].

Underscore in your mind this vital truth: obedience is taught, not caught. Similarly, love is taught, not caught. Perhaps infatuation can be said to be caught, but infatuation is superficial. Without training, infatuation will never grow into love; love must be taught. In our fallen state we seek to set "self" at the centre of our world. Thus situated at the centre of our existence, we will tolerate nothing that threatens our self-created security. We are prepared to "love" God on the condition that He will give us good things; however, by nature we are incapable of loving Him because of who He is! Our natural tendency is to seek the gifts and not the Giver.

Operating in the flesh, we are offended should anyone expose our charade. We resist such exposure, precisely because resistance is natural. When we act this way, we verify the Word of God that teaches, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ‘For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16].

Are you taught? Are you sitting under sound instruction that teaches obedience to the Living God? Are you receiving biblical guidance that leads you into the joy of the Master? Tragically, many are being confirmed in their flesh to continue in the path of rebellion that is so natural. The message they embrace encourages them to feel good about themselves, to affirm their error rather than to walk in the path of obedience. I pray this does not describe you; I pray that you are walking in obedience to the Son of God. If you are not obedient, I can assure you on the authority of God’s Word that it cannot go well for you—neither now nor in the day when Christ returns. If you are refusing to walk in obedience to Him, you must be warned that you are refusing to embrace what is right and good. In that instance, you cannot anticipate that He will bless either you or the path in which you now walk.

If you would be blessed, you must be born from above and into the Family of God. This is not something that you can do for yourself—it is the work of God performed in the heart of that individual who turns to Christ the Lord. He presented His life as a sacrifice because of your sin. He took upon Himself all your sin so that you no longer need to face condemnation. He died, was buried and broke the bonds of death, rising from the tomb on the third day.

Now, the Word of God calls you to faith in this Living Saviour. We are taught in the Word, “Say the welcoming word to God—‘Jesus is my Master’—embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not ‘doing’ anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That’s salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: ‘God has set everything right between him and me!’” Then, a final promise says, “Everyone who calls, ‘Help, God!’ gets help” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13 The Message].^{iv}

I sincerely pray that you are a Christian; and if you are a Christian, it is time for you to be obedient to the will of God in all things. Walk in the path He has set before each one who calls Him Master. Openly confess Him as Master of your life, publicly identifying with Him as commanded in Scripture and placing your life in the fellowship of a congregation where the Word is taught in purity and in power. May God bless you as you walk in this way. Amen.

ⁱ HCSB = Holman Christian Standard Bible (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2002, 2003)

ⁱⁱ NLT = **Holy Bible: New Living Translation** (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 1996, 2004)

ⁱⁱⁱ Wuest = **The New Testament: An Expanded Translation** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1997)

^{iv} The Message = **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)