

The Value of Obedience

By Scott Moller

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”
(Psalm 51:10)

Some time ago I wrote this note in my Bible at the end of the book of Jonah: “In sin I am utterly useless to God!” We certainly see this in the life of Jonah. Unfortunately, in this Age of Grace, many Christians are living as if obedience is optional in their lives. Most evangelical churches have taught the precepts of Ephesians 2:8&9 well: that by grace we are saved through faith **not by works** so that no one can boast. Most often the teaching stops at that point, leaving the impression that good works have little value because they have no part in our salvation. What is missed is verse 10: *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* We were created to do good works not to assist in our salvation, but to fulfill God’s purposes.

Our assigned, “good works”, cannot be accomplished when we are living in sin, disobedience or rebellion to God. While living in this condition, the “good works” usually do not happen, but even when they do, they most often arise from the flesh instead of the Spirit. This occurs because a believer who is living in disobedience is quenching the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19); therefore, he does not hear the leading of the Spirit. When a believer quenches the Spirit, he is left to the direction of his own flesh. This leads to worthless good works in the life of the Christian. Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 3 that we might be saved but our “good works” might be found to be worthless when judged by God.

The Bible is full of examples of people who proclaim to be followers of God but choose to go their own way. King Saul comes to mind for me. In 1 Samuel 15, God commands King Saul to totally destroy the Amalekites as punishment for their sin. This included destroying all of the livestock and plunder normally taken in war. The prophet Samuel visited Saul after the victory over the Amalekites. Samuel discovered that Saul had allowed the soldiers to keep the best of the livestock as plunder. Saul quickly began to make excuses for his disobedience, claiming that the livestock was kept to be sacrificed to the Lord. Samuel replied in verse 22, *“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in **obeying** the voice of the Lord? To **obey** is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”* Saul chose to be led by his own will (spirit) instead of the Holy Spirit. The consequence of Saul’s disobedience was the loss of his kingdom and his fellowship with the Lord.

In contrast, Jesus sets the perfect example for the Christian. Jesus stated in John 5:19 *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”* Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father. This obedience was maintained through continual submission of his will to the will of the Father. By living in obedience, Jesus remained in continual fellowship with the Father. In addition, he fully accomplished every purpose the Father had for him.

What is the value of obedience in the lives of Christians? First, it brings us into peace and fellowship with God. We cannot be at rest in our relationship with God while we are living in rebellion to his commands and calling. Second, we can know the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is difficult to discern the will of God while we are seeking our own will. Jesus prayed in the garden “not as I will, but as you will.” Third, it makes us available for works of righteousness. God cannot use us for His good works while we are living in unrighteousness.

Fourth, it helps us to avoid the sorrows brought on by sin. Even in the lives of the Christians, sin has painful consequences that can be avoided through obedience. Lastly, it allows us to store up eternal rewards in addition to our salvation. Jesus and His apostles often spoke of eternal rewards that are earned in this life. Jesus encouraged us to store up treasures in heaven. God has more than salvation in store for those who live obedient and pleasing lives to him.

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
(Matthew 6:20-21NIV)