

The Obedience of Faith

By Ginny Larsen

The Lord seeks our obedience. So what is obedience? It is important that we understand the obedience the Lord wants from us. Many seek to give *an* obedience that can never please God. It is the same *obedience of the flesh* of the Judaizers that Paul struggled against as he wrote to the Galatians. The *obedience of faith* is the only obedience God will accept from us. No obedience of our flesh will do.

We cannot obey the truth without faith in the finished work of Christ. Faith and obedience in Christ are practically synonymous. Our obedience is to **believe into Him** and trust Him to be our only salvation, sanctification, righteousness, and life every day. When we try to work for our salvation (whether to obtain it or keep it) by outward works and observances, even what appears to be obedience to the law, we disobey God, because we do not walk by faith in Him – rather, we walk by faith in our own righteousness.

The apostles brought the gospel message – the **obedience of faith in Christ**, “*through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations*” (Romans 1:5).

“*Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith*” (Romans 16:25-26), “*and to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief*” (Hebrews 3:18-19).

Those walking according to outward religious works, rituals, and laws are walking *according to the flesh* and not the Spirit. They never enter into His rest because of their unbelief – the rest of faith in the finished work of Christ and His sufficiency as their only righteousness. They believe they must still somehow have a part in producing their own righteousness before God. In thinking they are obeying God by keeping certain forms, rules, etc., they are actually walking in disobedience, trusting in their own righteousness.

“**But without faith it is impossible to please Him:** for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Those in the (*religious*) flesh seek to please God by their service. But if they are not walking in faith in His inner workings in and through them, confident in His righteousness imputed to them, it is impossible for them to please God. They are still in the flesh. “As to man, the law and the ordinances were only bondage. They aimed at bridling the will without its being changed” (J.N. Darby on Galatians 4:1-31). “*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*” (Galatians 4:9) Let’s look at the definitions of some of these words:

Weak – powerless to justify: in contrast to the justifying power of faith (Galatians 3:24; compare Hebrews 7:18).

Beggarly – contrasted with the riches of the inheritance of believers in Christ (Ephesians 1:18). The state of the child (Galatians 4:1) is weak, as not having attained manhood; beggarly, as not having attained the inheritance.

Elements – it is as if a schoolmaster should go back to learning the A, B, C'S [Bengel].

Again – there are two Greek words in the original. Ye desire again, beginning afresh, to be in bondage. Though the Galatians, as Gentiles, had never been under the Mosaic yoke, yet they had been under the elements of the world (Galatians 4:3): the common designation for the Jewish and Gentile systems alike, in contrast to the Gospel (however superior the Jewish was to the Gentile). Both systems consisted in outward worship and cleaved to sensible forms. Both were in bondage to the elements of sense, as though these could give the justification and sanctification which the inner and spiritual power of God alone could bestow (Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown Commentary on Galatians 4:9).

This is today what many ministers of the gospel seek to teach their congregation – to bridle the will by striving to keep the law, rather than walking by faith in the power of His righteousness and the indwelling Spirit, Who brings to us the life and righteousness of Christ Himself in our hearts. They draw their congregations back to the beggarly elements of living the Christian life by works of law, rather than an obedience of faith. It is only the righteousness of Christ Himself that will ever be pleasing to God, and it is only our yielding to that righteousness by faith in Him that will be considered obedience to Him.

May the Lord deal completely with our religious flesh and expose it! May He reveal to us a righteousness of faith and obedience to that righteousness by faith. May we embrace the same obedience to righteousness (the righteousness of Christ) that Paul himself did:

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh – though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:3-9).