

A Life of Principled Obedience

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Now may I encourage you to turn with me to the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119. And follow as I read verses 57 through 60, a great Psalm in which the blessedness of the precepts, the judgments, the ways, the word of the Living God is celebrated in so many dimensions of the heart of the Psalmist interacting with God and His Word. And here in this particular section, the Psalmist confesses,

"Jehovah is my portion: I have said that I would observe Thy words. I entreated Thy favor with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to Thy word. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not, to observe Thy commandments."

As I indicated in our prayer meeting this last Wednesday evening, it is my purpose to speak to you tonight on the subject "A Life of Principled Obedience: The Heart of True Godliness." And as I attempt to address that subject, I do so convinced that there are few if any passages which more comprehensively and succinctly state the major ingredients of such a life of principled obedience than does this passage that I have read in your hearing. But before we turn to examine the contents of this passage by way of a rather lengthy introduction, I want to underscore in your hearing by quoting seven or eight or nine key texts the central place this matter of obedience to God has in the religion revealed in the Bible. And the only religious experience and truth that we are concerned about is that which is contained in this book. And when we turn to this book with the question, "What place does obedience have in the true religion revealed in the Bible?", we are struck again and again with the central place which is given to this matter of obedience.

When we turn to the opening chapters of our Bibles, we have an account of creation. And we have a record of our first parents placed in the garden of Eden. And God made it plain that all of the joy and all of the blessedness which they knew as they came from God's created hand would remain only so long as they adhered to a path of obedience. For you remember, God gave a commandment:

"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof [that is, in the day that you cease to obey Me with reference to that tree] thou shalt surely die [literally, dying you will die]."

All of the blessedness, all the life of communion with God, the life of true love toward God, toward fellow men--all of that would come to a tragic end the moment man stepped out of the path of obedience. And when our first father stepped out of that path, we stepped out of it in him and with him, so that the mark of every son and daughter of Adam is given in a passage like Ephesians 2:2. We are by nature not only children of wrath, but we are "the sons of disobedience." That's the generic term

of the human race apart from the grace of God. It is a race committed to a course of principled disobedience to the revealed will of God.

When the second Adam, the Lord Jesus, came forth to redeem a people, the Bible makes it plain that He would redeem them only in a path of obedience. And where the first Adam fell through disobedience, the second Adam would secure salvation in the course of principled obedience to the will of God. And so in Romans 5:19, we read, "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One [Jesus Christ] shall the many be made righteous."

And again, our Bibles tell us in Philippians 2 that He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It was an act of deliberate, conscious obedience which caused our Lord Jesus to pour out His life's blood upon the cross. And that salvation which He purchased in His course of obedience, He now confers only in a way that makes all its recipients obedient subjects of the Living God.

And so in 1 Peter 1:2, Peter can speak of the people of God as those who are foreknown of God unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ. And the blood of Christ is never sprinkled upon any soul but that that soul is brought into a path of obedience. This is why the writer to Hebrews can say as he does in Hebrews 5:8-9, "Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became unto all them that obey Him the author of eternal salvation." The salvation He purchased in His own course of loving obedience, whenever that salvation is applied with power, it produces in all of its recipients a course of principled obedience to the will of God that is reflective of the course which their Savior walked in procuring that salvation.

And furthermore, the Word of God describes the glorified in heaven in Revelation 14:12 as those who are keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. So they are there not as self-righteous people who think that their imperfect obedience is the ground of their salvation. No, they cling to the faith of Jesus, the first rudiments of which are the confession of utter sinnerhood, for He came not to call the righteous, but sinners. But having come to the acknowledgment of sinnerhood and having cast themselves upon the mercy of God in Christ, keeping the faith of Jesus, it has produced a life of resolute obedience. They keep the commandments of God. And so when anyone professes to be a recipient of the salvation of God in Christ and obedience is not the basic pattern of the life, God calls such a person a liar. 1 John 2:3-4: "And hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Now, dear people, I've quoted seven, eight, nine, ten texts. And I hope the cumulative effect of them upon your own mind and conscience has been convincing. This matter of obedience is not some secondary or tertiary matter. It is not something that touches, as it were, obliquely upon the heart of true religion. It lies at the very center and core of true revealed religion.

"What then", you ask me, "Pastor Martin, do you mean by the use of the term 'a life of principled obedience: the heart of true Godliness'?" Well, by obedience, I mean nothing more or less than this (and I'll give you a technical definition, and then, I hope, a practical description): conscious, whole-soul conformity to the precepts of

God with primary regard to the authority of God that stands behind the precepts. What is a life of obedience Biblically defined? It is conscious whole-soul conformity to the precepts of God with primary regard to the authority of God that stands behind those precepts.

What is an obedient son or daughter? Is a son or daughter who when Mom or Dad says, "Honey, time to come in from play", the kid pulls a pout a mile long, chin dragging on the ground, and the feet, as it were, almost tugging at one another to stay out in the yard? Would the parent say, "Thank you, dear. That was a wonderful expression of hearty obedience to Mommy and Daddy"? No, the feet may be coming into the house, but you do not call obedience that kind of grudging, reluctant activity, which probably has a primary concern, not to respect the authority of the Mother or Father, but a wholesome fear of the rod that will come if they don't get their feet in. But if the Mother or Father calls out and says, "Honey, time to come in for supper", and the child says, "Okay, Mom, I'm on my way", and the little bright-faced child comes running up to the porch, runs by Mom, gives her a kiss on the cheek, washes hands, comes to supper and says, "What's for supper, Mom?", then she can say, "Mommy is very pleased the way you obeyed her when she called you." You see the difference?

Now that obedience which is the mark of a regenerate heart, that obedience which is the mark of our Lord Jesus in the procurement of his salvation, and is the mark of His people in the application of salvation, is conscious. It's not something that we float into. The little girl who's called, she knows she's heard her mommy's voice, and there's the psychology and the whole mental process that says, "Mommy has spoken; mommy's worthy to be obeyed." She may not stop and think all of this through, but that's what's going on. And she consciously, then, by an act of the will sends signals to her feet, and her little paddy feet come right up the stairs and into the house. It is a conscious whole-soul conformity to the precepts of her mommy with primary regard to the authority of her mommy which is in those precepts. And so obedience as we consider it tonight is nothing less than this conscious whole-soul conformity to the precepts of God with primary reference to the authority of God behind the precepts.

Now it is just such obedience that unregenerate people cannot render to God. Romans 8:7: "The carnal mind is enmity against God." You see, the God who stands behind the precepts is the object of the enmity. Now Paul says, "For it is not subject to the law of God [that is, the revelation of His will in His precepts], neither indeed can it be." "Can" is a word of ability. There is a moral impossibility. But the wonder of God's regenerating grace is that God changes that "cannot be", and He says,

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep Mine ordinances, and do them. [I will so overcome that native enmity by the mighty regenerating work of My Spirit that you will find yourselves consciously, with the whole soul, choosing to walk in the path of obedience to My revealed will]" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Jeremiah states it a bit differently in Jeremiah 31:33, the same promise of the new covenant in which God says that He will write His laws and His statutes upon our hearts.

But now the point that is so crucial to our study as we come now to Psalm 119:57. Though apart from the regenerating work of God, this obedience is impossible--follow closely now, for here's the heart of the matter--the regenerative work of God does not make obedience something other than conscious, whole-soul conformity to God's precepts. It gives a will to be conformed to the precepts. It gives power to be conformed to the precepts. It gives motives inclining us to obey the precepts. But it does not alter the psychology of obedience, and that is a conscious, deliberate choice to do what God says because God says it. And if I feel good in doing it--halleluia! And if I feel rotten, it makes no difference. If I feel blah, it makes no difference. And I'm convinced after years of wrestling in pastoral situations, until some of you come to grips with this, you're going to go limping and halting all of your days because you know precious little of a principled life of obedience.

When there's right confluence of your feelings and your moods and the time of the day and the weather, and obedience is something into which you are floated, as it were, on a flowery combination of all of these wonderful things, then you obey. But let your soul be conscious of the storm of remaining sin battering at its doors; let your mind be conscious of Satanic oppression; let your body be conscious of weariness, and you throw all obedience to the wind, and you live like a pagan because you didn't feel like it. And I want by every means possible by winsomeness, by sarcasm, by logic, and above all, by the words of God to attack that mentality with a holy vengeance. And I pray God will explode it out of your breast and replace it with the spirit of principled obedience that is determined to do the will of God no matter what the cost.

Well, so much for that lengthy but I felt necessary introduction. Now we come to the text. And first of all, we have in verse 57 what I'm calling the roots of a life of principled obedience. If you and I together are to render to God a life of principled obedience, these two roots described in verse 57 must be present. The Psalmist declares, "Jehovah is my portion: I have said that I would observe Thy words." Now the two roots of a life of principled obedience are these: first of all, a saving choice of God ("Jehovah is my portion"), and secondly, a saving commitment to God ("I have said that I would observe Thy words"). Now without those two roots, there can never be a life of principled obedience.

The Psalmist could say first of all, "Jehovah, [the great God of the covenant, the God who has now manifested to us in Jehovah Jesus] is my portion." In other words, he has taken God Himself to be the supreme object of his love and his affection. He had come to what I'm calling to be a saving choice of God to be His God. To put it in New Testament language, when Jehovah Jesus stands before the Psalmist saying, "I am the bread of life", the Psalmist says, "O Lord Jesus, Thou shalt be my portion of bread. I will eat of Thee." And when He stands saying, "I am the water of life. If any man thirsts, let him come to Me and drink", he says, "Thou shalt be the portion of my cup and my inheritance forever." When the Lord Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life", to say, "Jehovah is my portion" is to make that choice of God, Jehovah, God of the covenant, God of saving mercy in terms of the revelation He's made of Himself. And to make that God your God in that choice, in that embrace, is the very essence of true and Biblical conversion.

Now if you're sitting here tonight as someone who has never been brought to the discovery of your sin and your desperate need of God revealed in Jesus Christ, your desperate need which Christ alone can give to needy sinners in the virtue of His

perfect life and His death upon the cross, my dear friend, all you can do if you go out and are determined to live a life of principled obedience is either end up in total frustration or become a self-deceived hypocrite. Content with external conformity to a life of decency and religious performance, you must have this first root: a life of principled obedience grows upon this root of a saving choice of God. And there are many of you, I have reason to believe, who by God's grace have made that saving choice.

And if it is indeed a saving choice of the Lord to be your portion, then it has been joined to the second part of the verse, a saving commitment to God. For notice, the same one who could say, "The Lord is my portion" says, "I have said as the deepest resolution of my heart and spiritual consciousness that I would observe Thy words." The God who was his portion was his sovereign. He had not only taken Jehovah to be to him all that He is revealed as God of covenant mercy, he had taken His words as the rule of his life. Listen to the comments of Bridges on this second part of the text in his excellent commentary on Psalm 119:

"If we take the Lord as our portion, we must take Him as our king. 'I have said this is my deliberate resolution that I would keep Thy words.' Here is the Christian complete, taking the Lord as his portion and His Word as his rule. All that we are and all that we have are His, cheerfully surrendered as His right and willingly employed in His work. Thus do we evidence that we truly have His salvation, for [and then he quotes a text I quoted earlier] 'He became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey Him.'"

May I ask you sitting here tonight, do you have the roots essential to the life of principled obedience? Have you, by God's grace, chosen God Himself, revealed in Christ, to be your portion, not have you chosen to live a half decent life, chosen to go to church, chosen to raise a hand and have an evangelist pray for you? No, has the Holy Spirit unveiled to you the dept of your need that can only be met in the glory of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, and have you made Him your choice to be yours? And if there's been that saving choice of God, then there has been with it a saving commitment to God, the joyful resignation of your will to Him and the practical expression of that choosing His words henceforth to be the rule of your life. Now is that true of you? If it isn't, my friend, you have no Biblical grounds to say you're a Christian. And that may be the heart of the problem with some of you when it comes to trying to live a life of principled obedience--the root of the matter is simply not in you. There's never been a saving choice of God Himself and a saving commitment to God. And if there hasn't been, then here and now this very night as God speaks in the overtures of His grace and mercy, make Him your choice, bow your neck to Him, come under the yoke of Him who said, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Apart from this saving choice of God and this saving commitment to God, there will be neither the power nor the motivation to a life of obedience. For the motive to a life of obedience is love to Christ. And our love to Christ is always the response of His love to us received and embraced by faith and drunk into the soul that feels keenly its need for Him. "If you love Me," He said, "you will keep My commandments." And so without this twofold root system, there will neither be the motivation nor the power for a life of principled obedience.

But then notice in the second place, not only do we have the roots of the life of principled obedience in our text, but we have what I'm calling the climate (the spiritual atmosphere) for a life of principled obedience. And what is it? Well, again, there are

two parts. First of all the Psalmist says, "I entreated Thy favor with my whole heart", and then secondly, "Be merciful unto me according to Thy word." Then what is the twofold climate or atmosphere for a life of principled obedience?

Well, first of all, it is dependence upon God expressed in real prayer. "I [did what?] entreated." And what did he entreat? The favor of God, a Hebrew word which has as its root meaning face. Many entreat the favor of a king. They want the king to turn his face toward them with good will. "I entreated Your favor, Lord. And how did I do it? With my whole heart." You see what he was conscious of? He was conscious that it wasn't enough that he had the root of the matter in him (the Lord was his portion, and that he had sworn to a life of obedience). He knew that even a resolution of a renewed heart was not sufficient without present supplies of grace. And so the climate in which his life of principled obedience was expressed was one of dependence upon God expressed in real prayer. He entreated the favor of God with his whole heart.

And then the second part of the climate: faith in God's provision according to His promise. "Be merciful unto me." And what's the measure of his expectation of mercy? It is the precise size and shape of God's promises. "Be merciful unto me according to Thy word." That's the climate of a life of principled obedience, a climate in which there is not only the recognition, "In me, that is, in my flesh dwells no good thing." We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. "Without Me, you can do nothing." It is not only that conviction that drives us to entreat the favor of God with our whole heart.

But then it's coupled with confidence in the provision of God as He has committed Himself to that provision in His own promises. "Be merciful to me according to Thy Word. [The measure of my expectation and confidence is etched out and shaped by Your own promises.]" "My grace is sufficient for you." "Sin shall not have dominion over you." "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." "When I am weak, then am I strong." And those exceeding great and precious promises become to the person who has learned the rudimentary aspects of a life of principled obedience the very raw materials that he pleads in prayer. He doesn't come and just whine before God, "O Lord, I've messed up again. Somehow or other help me sometime, somewhere, by some means to do better." No, here was prayer for mercy to be granted according to the very promises of God. "I entreated Thy favor with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to Thy word."

Let me say by way of brief application, it's not enough that there will be a saving relationship to God in Christ. And I am not saying you need some further and deeper and exotic experience. But what I am saying is you must learn to cultivate a climate that is conducive to a life of principled obedience, a climate of conscious weakness and dependence that drives you to pray with your whole heart.

Some of you have much work to do at the throne of grace, but you'd never know it by the patterns of your life. And you can go on moaning and groaning till you die about the paltry progress you make in grace, but if you will not pray, your shattered, tattered garments of a shoddy life and your crippled and lame knees and ankles in walking the Christian life will be a constant monument of God's curse upon your prayer life. "You have not," James says, "because you ask not." And God has appointed prayer as the great means of exchanging our weakness for His strength. And if we despise that means, He will not tailor make another in order to either confirm you in your

willful ignorance or your blatant disobedience. And you can run from one elder to another and have 150 counseling sessions a week but still make no progress.

Some of you struggling with certain besetting sin, you don't come daily and many times a day crying to God to wither the roots of that sin, to bore into your heart and mind and spirit the virtue of the death of Christ, the sin-killing virtue of that death. You don't cry to God with your whole heart. And you wonder why you fall before that sin and go back and whimper before God and make a half-hearted effort to repent and resolve to do better tomorrow, knowing right well you'll be right back where you were. Whether the sin is lustful thoughts, whether the sin is envy, pride, unforgiveness, gluttony, an undisciplined mouth in your speech or in your eating patterns or drink, an ungoverned temper--whatever it is. And these are the sins in all their sordidness that come across the counseling desk again and again to us. Dear people, the climate of a life of principled obedience must be one of dependence upon God expressed in real prayer.

But then it must be also faith in God according to His promise. You must learn how to take His exceeding great and precious promises and turn them into fuel for prayer. Those of us in leadership try to set the example in having our prayers laced with Scripture. We try to set a pattern in our public ministry of what it is to plead with God according to His Word. And we can pray that you learn it, but ultimately, you must learn how to wrestle with God and His Word alone and in secret with Him. Now without that climate, there will be no life of principled obedience. You say, "Pastor, here I came expecting some special, exotic formula tonight, and you take us right back to prayer and Bible reading. I heard that when I was just a Christian ten months old in the Lord." Yeah, that's right. You know why you're no further along in the road than you are? Because you didn't listen to what you heard. That's right. I take you back to prayer and Bible reading because that's where the Psalmist takes us.

But now we come in the third place to what I call the actual process of a life of principled obedience. We've looked at the roots. We've looked at the climate or atmosphere. Now what's the actual process of a life of principled obedience? Someone who's being a good daughter or son, that when the heavenly Daddy speaks, he does what he's told--what's the process that goes on in the mind and heart, will and spirit of such a person? Well, it's set before us in the remaining verses. First of all, it's to begin with honest self-reflection. Verse 59: "I thought on my ways." That's a statement of honest self-reflection. "I--that's not somebody else, but this guy right here." The Psalmist said, "I personally thought, that is, I exercised my mind consciously, deliberately, and I did so with reference to my ways, that is, the patterns of my life." My ways are the patterns of my life: how I spend my time, how I respond to my wife, how I relate to my children, how I relate to my fellow elders, how I relate to my fellow workmen, how I relate to my neighbors, everything that constitutes a pattern in the whole fabric of my life. He says, "I thought on my ways." In other words, the actual process of a life of principled obedience demands a sober, realistic assessment of where you are.

It's been many years since I used the illustration; perhaps nobody here is old enough or has been around long enough to remember it, but I want to use it because it's come back to me so often. A missionary friend of mine many years ago was going to a preaching assignment out in a little town out in the rural parts of South Carolina with all the red dirt roads, and he'd gotten himself hopelessly lost. He didn't have any idea where he was. He couldn't find any signs for the town; his map did him no good.

He was just turned around backwards three times and just didn't know. So he figured if he could only find out where he was; so he was driving along and found this little boy on the side of the road, and he pulled over. And he came out and said, "Sonny, I'm lost. But if I knew where I was, I think I could get to where I have to be. Do you think you can tell me where I am?" The little boy looked at him, and he said, "Mister, you is right there." God has brought that little boy's words back to me time after time.

You know where you are? Some of you don't even stop to think. The Psalmist said, "I want to know exactly where I am. I thought on my ways. I reflected on the patterns of my life." And it's very evident in the context that he didn't do so just in some kind of reverie of the mind, but with the Word of God before him because he said (as we'll see in a moment) "...and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies." So he was not thinking on his ways in abstraction just sort of ruminating, looking over his past and present. But he was examining the patterns of his life in the light of the testimonies of God.

What does God say I'm to be as a husband, as a father, as a neighbor, as a friend? Here was reflection upon one's patterns in the light of the objective testimony of the Word of God. And there is no life of principled obedience as a pattern unless you're prepared for honest self-reflection in light of the standard of the Word of God. And that's got to become a spiritual habit. You say, "Man, this sounds like work." You bet your boots it's work. "You mean even when I don't feel like it?" Yes. "You mean even when I know if I think on my ways I can't avoid facing this sin and that sin?" Yes, yes! You must ever reflect upon your ways--honest self-reflection in light of the objective revelation of the Word of God.

And then that must be joined to what I'm calling conscious alteration of one's patterns. Look at the latter part of the verse: "I thought on my ways [and turned away from thinking because it made me miserable]." That's what some of you do. You start to think on your ways in the light of the Word of God, and you're such a mess in this area and that area. You say, "It's too painful to think about it." And so you go and turn on the television, or you pick up the newspaper, or you go out and cut the grass, or you go and do some other innocuous, silly thing. But that's not what the Psalmist did. He said, "I thought on my ways [and in the light of the testimonies of God when I discovered--uh oh--here's a pattern of my life that's contrary to the Word, here's a wrinkle in my life that doesn't line up with the Word, here's an abnormality that doesn't match the standard of the Word]." What did he do? Honest self-reflection led to conscious alteration: "I turned my feet." He did it. He didn't say, "I thought on my ways, and then I prayed, O God, turn my feet." He said, "I turned them. I did it."

But remember the climate? "I entreated Thy favor with my whole heart." He was a praying man. And in other places in this very Psalm, he's praying that God would turn him. Yes, it was in the climate and context of dependence, but notice, he didn't expect the grace of God to bypass the conscious action of his own will upon his own feet. "I turned my feet unto Thy testimonies." What's that mean? That means when you get up off your knees praying, "God help me with this matter of purity of mind," and you're watching the news, and on comes some jean ad that is borderline soft core pornography, turn the dumb tube off. And if you don't have grace to turn it off, get rid of it. You're praying, "O God, help me with my overeating." Then put some checks upon your mouth and upon what you put in the refrigerator, and start getting on those scales everyday and get honest with God.

Conscious alteration of the patterns of one's life. But you say, "I don't feel like it." There's not a word about feeling. "It's hard." There's not a word that says it wouldn't be. And I want you to notice what he says by way of qualification about that conscious alteration in the next verse. The one thing he expands upon is that point. After honest self-reflection, he says two things about the conscious alteration. Verse 60: "I made haste, and delayed not...." The alteration was immediate, and it was universal: "...to observe Thy commandments [plural]." He didn't pick and choose and say, "O well, that looks like an easy way fix up. I'll do that one. That way over there doesn't look too hard. I'll work on that one. But this one, I mean that will be undoing the patterns of a lifetime. That will be like pulling out my own teeth. That will be like plucking out my own eyes." Jesus said, "If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell."

You see, the bottom line with some of you is that you really don't believe this is necessary. And that's why you're making no progress. You're not merciless in this matter of altering your patterns by conscious steps of alteration immediately and universally because you've somehow been self-conned into thinking (it isn't from this pulpit you learned it) that you can still live at that miserable rate and have real confidence that you're a child of God and go to heaven at last in spite of all the passages that say the people of God are an obedient people, and all who name His name and are not are self-deceived. It was immediate. He made haste and delayed not.

Do you know what the result is for delaying to alter any pattern that comes under the convicting element of the Word of God? This is what we talked about this morning--hardness of heart. Remember Hebrews twice quoting from the Old Testament: "Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart." What's the connection between "today" and "harden not your heart"? The connection is this: if you do delay, the pressure upon the conscience become less, and the heart becomes hard.

What a beautiful picture. We considered this in the series on conscience. When David--and I was just reading it in my own devotions this past week and was struck with it again--how he made haste and delayed not. Saul had gone into the inner cave to relieve himself, the Scripture tells us. And David and his men were deeper in the cave. And here Saul was seeking David like he was some kind of common criminal, though he was innocent of all wrong doing. And David cuts off a little part of Saul's garment. And no sooner does he do it, but it says his heart smote him. Even that little act of disrespect to God's anointed--he made haste and delayed not to confess to his own men and openly his sin. "I made haste, and delayed not." There was immediate, conscious alteration, and there was universal conscious alteration ("I made haste, and delayed not, to observe Thy commandments"): all that God by His Spirit had pressed upon His conscience. Now notice, there is nothing about waiting till he felt led. There is nothing about waiting till he felt good about it. There is not a word about his feelings.

And O, dear people, some of you are chained in the tyranny of feelings. And you're never going to run the race with any alacrity and any real zeal until the chains of your feelings are broken. You're always waiting for a wave of lovely feelings to break upon the shore. And then you say, "I'll go riding in behind that wave of beautiful feelings." You're like the surfer out there waiting, waiting, waiting for the perfect wave. And he never gets up on his surfboard and makes it to shore. Waiting, waiting, waiting--a

better time, more convenient--waiting, waiting, waiting. How long will you wait under a ministry that under God in love goes after your conscience, a ministry that loves you enough not to let you be comfortable in your sin, that points you to the power of Christ and to the grace of Christ and the pity of Christ? How long will it be? How long waiting for your feelings, waiting till you feel good about it, waiting till you sense it's more convenient? There is none of this in the Psalmist. "I made haste, and delayed not, to observe Thy commandments." Now a life of principled obedience is when the things in this text become a spirit of habit. Sow a deed; reap a habit. And you start tonight, right here. If God has brought to your remembrance, even this day, issues that need to be made right with God and right with your brethren, you don't say, "Lord, tomorrow." Before you go through those doors, you have dealings with God.

I'm sure some of you think I'm a bit extreme when in the middle of the service, I confess my sins to 400 people. You know why I do it? "I must make haste and delay not to keep His commandments." Extreme? Not if you want a good conscience.

You see, some of you haven't begun to learn what this is. And frankly, I think it's the greatest pastoral burden we your elders bear. The greatest pastoral burden is people who are pampered from their infancy, brought up in a society that conned you into thinking that if it didn't feel good, it wasn't good; if it felt good, it was good. Overindulged by your parents; never made to do anything you didn't like to do; everything handed to you; never brought up lean with difficulty and hardship. And in one sense you're to be pitied and not blamed, but I tell you, there comes a point where you've heard enough not to cop out and say, "O well, I'm a postwar-generation person and can't help it." You've had enough encouragement and enough light and enough truth. God Almighty will hold you accountable if those patterns don't change.

Now there's nothing glamorous about this. There's not a word in this passage about feelings, not a word about a convenient season. It's all very cut and dried, isn't it? It is, but it isn't. Because when you live a life of principled obedience, you know what the reward is? I'll tell you what the reward is, and I want you to turn with me to several passages in the New Testament as we close tonight.

John 14. Here's the blessed reward of such a life of obedience. Verse 15: "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments." And then He made certain promises that had peculiar reference to that period in redemptive history when the Holy Spirit was to be given from the ascended Christ for the first time. And having been given, He has continued with His church. But interlaced with some of things that have in one dimension an exclusive reference to the people of God at that particular epoch in redemptive history, there are wonderful spiritual principles applicable to the disciples of Christ in all ages. Look at verse 21: "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me." This path of principled obedience is the constant affirmation and validation of the reality of my professed love to Christ. And here's the reward: "And he that loveth Me [that is, by a life of obedience manifesting that love] shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him." Here the special, the intensified, the more expansive, realized communion and fellowship with Christ Himself is the reward promised to a life of principled obedience. And you know, if you're a saved person, God can hold out no greater reward to you than this: Christ will be more precious. And there's no reward that will get you more excited than that if you're a real Christian.

And do you know that that's exactly how He maintained the smile of His own Father? One of the most amazing passages in the Bible is in chapter 15 of John's Gospel. Verse 10: "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love [that is, abide in the reality and consciousness of My love]; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." How could Jesus carry about with Him in His holy soul the constant consciousness of the Father's love? It's because He lived a life of principled obedience.

Listen to his description of such a life back in John chapter 10. And I want us to conclude by gazing at our Savior as the great pattern of principled obedience. He sets the pattern for us. As well as procuring salvation in His life of obedience unto death, He sets the pattern of principled obedience. John 10:17-18: "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from My Father." Jesus' path to the cross, though completely and at every point was totally voluntary ("I lay it down"), it was at one and the same time one act of conscious obedience to the Father's commandment. There's our pattern.

There was embedded in the mind and soul of Jesus a consciousness of the will of His Father. And as He ever reflected upon His ways, He turned His feet again and again into that path. When as a 12-year-old lad, His parents said, "Why?" He said, "Didn't you know I must be about My Father's business?" And when that obedience brought Him into the awful confrontation of Gethsemane, when perhaps the very powers of darkness began to press in upon His soul, and He contemplated the cup He would have to drink, and everything in His holy soul recoiled from the thought of the terrible baptism of dereliction and abandonment. And He cried out, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass. All of My feelings move me away from that path that goes to the cross. All of My inclination is away from the agony of Golgotha." His feelings were all pulling Him in this direction, but He said, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." Commitment to a life of principled obedience. Having to ride over not only every natural feeling of that shrinking back from agony and pain and public shame to be hung naked upon the cross among the rude stare of multitudes. But He had to ride over every holy feeling of revulsion of the thought of being severed from His Father in terms of conscious communion, every holy feeling of longing to maintain that communion He had known with His Father from eternity, and over which there had never come even the inkling of a cloud. But now He would be plunged in total darkness. But He said, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." And in that we read: "By which will we are sanctified once for all through the offering of the body of Jesus."

My friend, may I put it in a way that I hope will shock you. If Jesus had not lived a life of principled obedience, we'd have no Savior. And He died to have a people committed to a life of principled obedience. He didn't die to have a people who walk willy nilly at every whim and impulse of their feelings, who are chained by their moods (husbands who only love their wives when they feel good or when their wives are lovely, and wives who only submit to their husbands when they're very submittable, and children who only obey when they think the commands are reasonable and right and just, and people who only pray when they feel like it, and only come to the house of God when they feel like it and when it's convenient and when it's easy). No, Jesus died to have a people conformed to own image, His own moral image of a life of principled obedience.

Do you have the roots of such a life within you? I fear that may be the problem with some of you. The root is not there. There is no saving choice of God. There is no saving commitment to God. O, I plead with you. I plead with you. Go to God and ask Him to give you those roots. But then there must be the climate, one of dependence upon God expressed in real prayer, one of faith in God according to His promises. But then the actual process will be one of continuous, honest, self-evaluation in the light of the objective standard of the Word, and then conscious alteration (turning your feet unto His statutes immediately and universally).

You say, "Pastor, if that's what true religion is, that's too hard. I don't want it." Well then, my friend, make your own and go to hell with it. Make your own and perish with it because that's the only religion purchased by the blood of Jesus. You want something else? Then you make it, but be prepared to die with it and go to judgment with it. If you're not prepared to do that, then you better cry to God and do whatever you've got to do starting tonight to live a life of principled obedience because that's the mark that indeed you belong to Him.

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