

6. Our obedience = God's blessings

December 2, 2010

What good is the Word of God if we choose not to obey? Absolutely none. Even if we can memorize the entire Bible, but if we don't obey what the Lord says in it, what we know is nothing more than head full of knowledge to show off to someone else.

The world is full of the people who have head knowledge of God's Word – in most cases, they know it in twisted ways to accommodate their own selfish convenience. To make the matter worse, even many born-again Christians think that obeying the Word of God is somewhat optional. Is it really?

If that is the case, we might as well chuck this Book out the window and live the life as we please, why bother with all these "DOs and DON'Ts" in the Bible?

There are three essentials for Israel's conquest and enjoyment of the Promised Land:

- 1) Listening to God's Word
- 2) Remembering it
- 3) Obeying it

Come to think of it, they are still the essentials for a successful and satisfying Christian life today. As we walk through this world, we cannot succeed without God's guidance, protection, and provision that come from our listening to what the Bible says, remembering them, and obeying them.

James 1:25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

A. TO KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART

Deuteronomy 8:1-2 "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. 2 And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Our All-Knowing God doesn't need to test us to know what we have in our minds, rather it is for us to know.

Life is a proving ground for all of us, not for God. We often don't know what we are getting into until we fail the proving process. Some might say, "Oh yes, I know my heart very well." I think not; and I know not. Actually, it is a frightening fact that we really don't know how much evil we are capable of doing without God in our lives. For what we see on 6 o'clock news and shake our heads, we are all capable of doing them apart from Jesus.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

The devil tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God tests us to bring out the best in us. When God allows a difficult circumstance to test us, we will either trust Him and become more mature, or we will rebel against Him and become more miserable.

What is the remedy of this dilemma? Getting into the Word of God; remembering it and obeying it. The exact same remedy the Israelites should have been on.

B. LIVING BY THE BREAD OF LIFE

Deuteronomy 8:3-5 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5 You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.

A good instructor will evaluate their students and make them to realize that they need the instructions first before he or she gives anything. It is hard to teach someone who thinks that he or she knows it all. Because that person is not humbled and ready to receive instructions.

For the Israelites in the wilderness, each morning they received their ration from heaven to teach them to depend on the Lord for what they needed. But the manna was much more than daily physical sustenance. It was a type of the coming Messiah who is the 'Bread of Life', Jesus Christ.

When satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread in Matthew 4, Jesus quoted this very verse 3 to counter attack him. Jesus is our Bread of Life. We feed on Jesus when we feed on the Word of God. The Lord was teaching the Jews to look to Him for 'Daily Bread' and to begin each day meditating on the Word of God.

Among the Israelites, those who obeyed God in the daily responsibility of gathering manna would be inclined to obey the rest of His commandments. Our relationship to the Word of God, the manna, indicates our relationship to the God of the Word.

A couple of Sundays ago, I mentioned about the Israelites detested "the worthless bread" – despising God's provision for them. I neglected to mention that the manna represented the Messiah. Gary Hurley pointed out to me that I missed it. He was absolutely right about that. Thanks, Gary, for reminding me.

Ladies, can you imagine wearing the same cloth for forty years because it never wears out on you? It was as good and new looking as the first day. Guys would be perfectly happy with their favorite shirts, but for ladies, no way, Jose.

V5 shows us the true love of God for His children. How many children ended up in ruin under the name of protecting self-esteem in America last thirty years! Rather than making lazy students to be productive and competitive ones in their school work, it was easier for liberal educational leaders of America to make bright and competitive students who were in honor roll become unproductive.

Discipline is "child training," the preparation of the child for responsible adulthood. A judge justly punishes a convicted criminal in order to protect society and uphold the law, but a father lovingly disciplines a child to help that child mature. Discipline is an evidence of God's love and of our membership in God's family.

Hebrews 12:5-8 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening,

God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become part-takers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Chastening is evidence of God's hatred for sin and His love for His people. We can't conceive of a holy God wanting anything less than His very best for His children, and the best He can give us is a holy character like that of Jesus Christ. Obedience to the Lord builds character, but sin destroys character. God cannot sit idly by and watch His children destroy themselves.

You may know someone who only cares about material things and in results, their lives are absolutely one mess after another. Yet they don't surrender to the Lord.

C. THE BENEFITS OF OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD

Deuteronomy 8:6-10 Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. 7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9 a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10 When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

As we all know that the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness. Why? Because of their disobedience to the Lord. The wilderness was never their destination after the exodus from Egypt. It was the Promised Land where they had all the rich inheritance from the Lord.

It goes the same for the Christian life. Being born-again and redeemed from sin is only the beginning of our walk with Christ, a great beginning. If we continuously surrender our will to the Lord and obey Him, He would give us far beyond our imagination – making us to be more than conquerors with rich inheritance in Christ Jesus.

The original size of the land God promised to them was over 300,000 square miles, from the Euphrates River to Egypt. But because of their disobedience, even the strongest time of Israel, during the reign of king David and Solomon, they only have 30,000 square miles, only one tenth of the Lord's inheritance.

This typifies for believers today the spiritual wealth we can have in Christ – the riches of His grace, glory, mercy, and other unsearchable riches of Christ.

God is not against material things – except when they come between us and Him. God wants to bless us when we are spiritually obedient to Him. We cannot pull the wool over our God's eye – thinking that we are obedient to Him so that we can be blessed. His blessings to us is a side product of being obedient to Him.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

The motive for our obedience has to be love for the Lord our God. If we loved Him, then we would delight in walking in all His ways and obeying all His commandments. Jesus said this was the first and greatest commandment. In other words, to disobey it would mean to commit the greatest sin.

Obedience to the will of God gives us freedom, not bondage. We are never more free than when we fulfill the plan God has for our lives.

D. A WARNING AGAINST PRIDE

Deuteronomy 8:11-17 "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, 12 lest--when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14 when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; 15 who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end-- 17 then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'

V17 reminds me a former heathen king who was about to verbalize this thought from the top of his palace while he was looking down his domain, became a beast for seven years – of course, I am talking about king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

There is a great danger in prosperity and comfort, because we may become so wrapped up in the blessings of God that we forget where those blessings came from. For this reason, Moses was admonishing them to remember to give thanks to the Lord for all the blessings they get.

This "My power and the might of my hand" is rarely said with the lips of Christians, but I wouldn't be surprised that if it is said instead in the heart of us. Unfortunately, we all have done it before. If we are not careful, we will do it again in future.

E. HAVE IT YOUR WAY

Deuteronomy 8:18-20 And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. 20 As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God.

Idolatry begins in the heart when gratitude to the Giver is replaced by greediness for the gifts.

Romans 1:21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

An ungrateful heart can quickly become a haven for all sorts of sinful attitudes and appetites that cater to the flesh.

What would the Lord do? He would treat His own people's idolatry the way He treated the idolatry of the nations that they dispossessed, and He would destroy Israel and their false gods. Before Moses finished his speech, he outlined the terms of God's covenant with Israel and the chastening God would send if the people persisted in worshipping idols.

Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned this morning in the presence of a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that the military is based on meritocracy, "what you do, not who you are." He said if Congress changes the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy then the U.S. military will comply. This country is embracing all the perversions over obeying what the Lord says in the Bible. The mightiest military over all the world will become a not-so-mighty one.

Prosperity > ingratitude > idolatry: these are three steps toward ruin. But these aren't ancient sins, because they're present in hearts, homes, businesses, and churches today.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Curiosity or interest in God's Word without submission to it is a grave danger.

2) When God allows a difficult circumstance to test us, we will either trust Him and become more mature, or we will rebel against Him and become more miserable.

3) Obedience to the will of God gives us freedom, not bondage. We are never more free than when we fulfill the plan God has for our lives.