

“If Ye Love Me, Keep My Commandments”

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Using our agency to obey means choosing to “do what is right [and letting] the consequence follow.”

Brothers and sisters, of all the lessons we learn from the life of the Savior, none is more clear and powerful than the lesson of obedience.

The Savior’s Example

In the premortal Council in Heaven, Lucifer rebelled against Heavenly Father’s plan. Those who followed Lucifer ended their eternal progression—be careful who you follow!

Then Jesus expressed His commitment to obey, saying, “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.”¹ Throughout His ministry, “he suffered temptations but gave [them] no heed.”² Indeed, “he [learned] obedience by the things which he suffered.”³

Because our Savior was obedient, He atoned for our sins, making possible our resurrection and preparing the way for us to return to our Heavenly Father, who knew we would make mistakes as we learned obedience in mortality. When we obey, we accept His sacrifice, for we believe that through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws, ordinances, and commandments given in the gospel.⁴

Jesus taught us to obey in simple language that is easy to understand: “If ye love me, keep my commandments,”⁵ and “Come, follow me.”⁶

When we are baptized, we “take upon [us] the name of Christ” and enter “into the covenant with God that [we will] be obedient unto the end of [our] lives.”⁷ Each Sunday we renew that baptismal covenant by partaking of the sacrament and witnessing that we are willing to keep the commandments. We seek forgiveness for any thoughts, feelings, or actions that are not in harmony with our Heavenly Father’s will. As we repent by turning away from disobedience and by beginning to obey again, we show our love for Him.

Types of Obedience

As we live the gospel, we progress in our understanding of obedience. At times we may be tempted to practice what I call “natural man’s obedience,” in which we disobediently reject God’s law in favor of our wisdom or our desires or even popularity. Because this is widely practiced by so many, this perversion of obedience diminishes God’s standards in our culture and in our laws.

At times members may participate in “selective obedience,” claiming to love God and honor God while picking and choosing which of His commandments and teachings—and the teachings and counsel of His prophets—they will fully follow.

Some obey selectively because they cannot perceive all the reasons for a commandment, just as children do not always understand the reasons for their parents’ counsel and rules. But we always know the reason we follow the prophets, for this is the Church of Jesus Christ, and it is the Savior who directs His prophets in all dispensations.

As our understanding of obedience deepens, we recognize the essential role of agency. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed three times to His Father in Heaven, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”⁸ God would not override the Savior’s agency, yet He mercifully sent an angel to strengthen His Beloved Son.

The Savior met another test on Golgotha, where He could have called upon legions of angels to take Him down from the cross, but He made His own choice to obediently endure to the end and complete His atoning sacrifice, even though it meant great suffering, even death.

Spiritually mature obedience is “the Savior’s obedience.” It is motivated by true love for Heavenly Father and His Son. When we willingly obey, as our Savior did, we cherish the words of our Heavenly Father: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”⁹ And we look forward to hearing, upon entering our Heavenly Father’s presence, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter ... into the joy of thy lord.”¹⁰

Using our agency to obey means choosing to “do what is right [and letting] the consequence follow.”¹¹ It requires self-mastery and brings confidence, eternal happiness, and a sense of fulfillment to us and, by example, to those around us; and it always includes a deep personal commitment to sustain priesthood leaders and follow their teachings and counsel.

Consequences

In choosing whether we will obey, it is always helpful to remember the consequences of our choices. Did Lucifer and his followers understand the consequences of choosing to reject Heavenly Father’s plan? If so, why did they make such a terrible choice? We might ask ourselves a similar question: why do any of us choose to be disobedient when we know the eternal consequences of sin? The scriptures provide an answer: the reason Cain and some of the children of Adam and Eve chose to disobey is because “they loved Satan more than God.”¹²

Our love of the Savior is the key to Savior-like obedience. As we strive to be obedient in today’s world, we declare our love and respect for all of Heavenly Father’s children. Yet it is impossible for this love for others to modify God’s commandments, which were given for our good! For example, the commandment “thou shalt not ... kill, nor do anything like unto it”¹³ is founded upon spiritual law that protects all of God’s children, even the unborn. Long experience suggests that when we ignore this law, immeasurable sorrow results. Yet many believe it is acceptable to terminate the life of an unborn child for reasons of preference or convenience.

To rationalize disobedience does not change spiritual law or its consequences but leads to confusion, instability, wandering in strange paths, being lost, and grief. As disciples of Christ, we have a sacred obligation to uphold His laws and commandments and the covenants which we take upon ourselves.

In December 1831 some of the brethren were called upon to help allay unfriendly feelings that had developed

toward the Church. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord directed them in an unusual, even surprising way:

“Confound your enemies; call upon them to meet you both in public and in private. ...

“Wherefore, let them bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord.

“... No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper;

“And if any man lift his voice against you he shall be confounded in mine own due time.

“Wherefore, keep my commandments; they are true and faithful.”¹⁴

Lessons in the Scriptures

The scriptures are full of examples of prophets who have learned the lessons of obedience by their own experience.

Joseph Smith was taught the consequences for yielding to the pressures of his benefactor, friend, and scribe Martin Harris. In response to Martin’s pleas, Joseph asked the Lord for permission to loan the first 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon so that Martin could show them to his family, but the Lord told Joseph to say no. Martin pleaded with Joseph to ask the Lord again. After Joseph’s third request the Lord gave permission for five specific people to review the manuscript. “In a most solemn covenant Martin bound himself to this agreement. When he arrived home, and pressure was brought to bear upon him, he forgot his solemn oath and permitted others to view the manuscript, with the result that by stratagem it passed out of his hands,”¹⁵ and it was lost. As a consequence, Joseph was rebuked by the Lord and was denied permission to continue to translate the Book of Mormon. Joseph suffered and repented of his transgression of yielding to the pressures of others. After a season, Joseph was allowed to resume his translation work. Joseph learned a valuable lesson of obedience that served him the rest of his life!

The prophet Moses provides another example. When Moses obediently took an Ethiopian wife, Miriam and Aaron spoke against him. But the Lord rebuked them, saying, “With [Moses] will I speak mouth to mouth.”¹⁶ The Lord used this incredible incident to teach members of the Church in our dispensation. In 1830 Hiram Page claimed to receive revelation for the Church. The Lord corrected him and taught the Saints, “Thou shalt be obedient unto the things which I shall give unto [Joseph], even as Aaron,”¹⁷ “for he receiveth them even as Moses.”¹⁸

Obedience brings blessings, “and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”¹⁹

Obedience is taught by example. By how we live, we teach our children, “Learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.”²⁰

Obedience makes us progressively stronger, capable of faithfully enduring tests and trials in the future. Obedience in Gethsemane prepared the Savior to obey and endure to the end on Golgotha.

My beloved brothers and sisters, the words of Alma express the feelings of my heart:

“And now my beloved brethren, I have said these things unto you that I might awaken you to a sense of your duty to God, that ye may walk blameless before him. ...

“And now I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive and gentle; ... being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times.”²¹

I bear my special witness that our Savior lives. Because He obeyed, “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess ... that he is [our Savior].”²² May we love Him so deeply and believe Him in faith so completely that we too obey, keep His commandments, and return to live with Him forever in the kingdom of our God is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Moses 4:2.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 20:22.

3. Hebrews 5:8.

4. See Articles of Faith 1:3.

5. John 14:15.

6. Luke 18:22.

7. Mosiah 5:8.

8. Matthew 26:39; see also verses 42, 44.

9. Matthew 3:17; see also 3 Nephi 11:7.

10. Matthew 25:21.

11. “Do What Is Right,” *Hymns*, no. 237.

12. Moses 5:13.

13. Doctrine and Covenants 59:6.

14. Doctrine and Covenants 71:7–11.

15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (1922), 65; see also Doctrine and Covenants 3.

16. Numbers 12:8.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 28:3.

18. Doctrine and Covenants 28:2.

19. Doctrine and Covenants 130:21; see also verse 20.

20. Alma 37:35.

21. Alma 7:22–23.

22. Mosiah 27:31.

