

Keeping His Words

By Rick Ezell

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word” (John 17:6 NIV).

Jesus did not mince words. Obedience to Christ and his words is one of the most distinguishing marks of a Christian. Oswald Chambers stated, “Spiritual maturity is not reached by the passing of the years, but by obedience to the will of God.” Obedience is the gauge of our discipleship, the litmus test of his Lordship, and the indicator of our spiritual maturity. Baptist Pastor, Peter Lord, was fond of saying, “What I believe I do and the rest is just religious talk.” As Jesus obeyed the Father we are to obey Jesus.

Obedience begins with the attitude of the mind. Jesus prayed that we be given the Word (vv. 8, 14). This word, which is not a secret code or a hidden message, is the stated facts or truths that have been clearly recorded in the Bible. They have been given to us. This is the action of God toward us. He has given us the steps we are to take, the actions we are to follow, the life we are to live. Here, we hear the words.

Obedience continues with the affection of the heart (v. 8). In a sense, everyone has been given the words of God. We are living in a day of the proliferation of the gospel. People hear the gospel, but not everyone believes. We are not to be merely hearers of the word; we are to receive the word. We must move from head knowledge of the words to a heart understanding of the words. In other words, it is not enough to take the words into our minds; they have to integrate our hearts. While many hear the words, not all receive the words. The words of Jesus, the words of scripture, only free us when we receive them into our hearts. Here, we apply the words.

Obedience results in the action of the will (v. 6). The word *kept* implies the controlling action of obedience. It shows that obedience moves from an attitude of the mind, to the affection of the heart, to the action of the will. The whole direction of our lives is moving toward obeying Jesus Christ in all his demands upon us. That is a Christian. A Christian is not saved *because* he obeys; he obeys *because* he is saved. Here, we appropriate the words.

Let me mention two disclaimers. One, Jesus is not saying that we will perfectly obey. We have sinned; we do sin; and we will sin. But, we are to be characterized by our obedience. We are growing, maturing in our obedience. We have kept the word.

Two, neither is Jesus saying that we can claim to be Christians and live disobedient lives. We often call these people “carnal Christians,” a distinction Paul never intended as a new category for Christians when he rebuked the church at Corinth for their sinfulness and immaturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). We cannot and must not give unregenerate sinners a chance to call themselves Christians without living like it. Faith is always evidenced by works (James 2).

True obedience will never let mere listening substitute for action. Jesus desires that we do more than share our thoughts and demand that he act when we pray. He wants us to act. Most believers are educated three years beyond their obedience. In other words, they have the training, the education, the knowledge of what needs to be done but they don't act.

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