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Obedient Unto Death

1313-A

Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Try to imagine if you can, that the wealthiest, most successful person in all the world is about to take a trip. A long trip. A trip that will take him into a land so foreign to his kind of existence that nothing about it will appeal to his natural instincts. The people there will be inconsiderate, unappealing, insensitive, malicious. They will have only their own interests at heart, and his only value to them will be what good he can do for them.

Morally, they are corrupt. Spiritually, they are confused and alienated. Their leader is our friend's worst enemy, whose goal from the beginning has been to destroy him. But our influential friend simply has to go. Why? Is it because he will benefit? No, from a human perspective, he runs the risk of losing it all. In fact, if the king of this land has his way, our friend will be ruthlessly murdered. Our friend knows this. He is going anyway.

Why? Why would a person who has everything leave everything to go to a place where he is unappreciated, not accepted, and certain to be murdered? There is only one reason. Love. You see, this man has a child who went astray very early in his life, and that child now lives in this enemy land. He has become trapped in a web of deceit and delusion, and unless someone intervenes, the child will die without his inheritance and without ever truly experiencing his father's love. The child now is a prisoner in this country, in bondage to our friend's worst enemy.

To him, he has no choice. Nothing means as much to him as his wayward child. Nothing. Not his wealth, not his kingdom, not his peaceful, powerful existence in his own land. His only goal is to bring back into the fold this lost and wandering son.

And so you have the background. He is preparing to go. He knows who he is and he knows what he has, but he is willing to give it all up for this one who seems so arrogant and undeserving. Our roving reporter is about to interview him now for WTB (Whole Truth Broadcasters). Here is the interview.

"Mr. Hova." (His name is "Jay" Hova.) "Do you realize what a risk you are taking? These people have vowed to kill you if you so much as set foot on their soil. Don't you know who you are?"

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You can just speak and your will is done. Why go yourself?"

Mr. Hova answers: "I know who I am, and I know what I have. But I will not clutch at what I have. It is expendable for the sake of those I love. I must go. My wayward child has no other hope."

"And if they kill you?" the reporter asks; "Then what will you have?" Quietly, Mr Hova answers, "I'll have my lost child. That's all that matters."

"But sir", the aggressive reporter continues, "Your child is a rebel. He is in total disobedience to you. He does not even claim to be your child." "That's all the more reason he needs to be rescued," Mr. Hova replies. "Now, excuse me, it's time for me to leave. I must go."

"Can you get into the country?" the reporter asks. "Only if I go as a slave," Mr. Hova responds. "I have been granted a visa to enter the country as a servant. I will certainly die. But if, by dying, my child shall live, it will be worth it all."

"Do you not realize that your enemy, King Beelzebub, has vowed to hang you from a tree while the whole nation mocks in derision and spits on you?"

"Yes, my friend, I do. I have counted the cost, and it will be worth it all." But," the reporter cries out as Mr. Hova boards the plane for his certain death, "What about all your wealth and your kingdom?" "I'm leaving that to my wayward child. He shall gain the inheritance, and I shall gain his life in exchange for mine. It will be a splendid trade."

With that, the most influential man in all the world walks to his death with a song in his heart because by dying, someone he loves can be saved. He knows the cost. To Him, it is worth it.

That is a modern day parallel to Philippians, chapter two. The God who framed the universe had brought into being a people who did not honor Him, love Him, or obey Him. They had escaped from His presence and were dwelling in a foreign land, a land controlled by Jehovah's worst enemy. Their only hope was for God Himself to leave heaven, enter this foreign land as a mere servant, and live as a peasant there, knowing that eventually He would be captured by jealous hypocrites, tried in a mockery of justice for crimes He did not commit, and eventually die the cruelest, most humiliating death known to

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man. And for whom? For the very people who were denying His existence and scorning His Word.

You see, He loved them. Oh, how He loved them. He loved them so much that the cost was worth it. And so, having counted the cost, He left His home in glory, accepted His passport to earth as a mere servant, and faced the ultimate eventuality of death with joy.

His last words to his wayward redeemed child, spoken through His special interpreter, a man named Paul, were these: “Let this mind be in you.” Let this mindset be yours: the mindset of one who is willing to joyfully die so that those who may be their worst enemies might live. Enter this world as a slave, one whose rights have been laid aside in favor of your new Master, and give yourself away for the least of these.

That was to be a portrait of the church in capsule form. The church was to be a band of men and women so committed even to those who were viscerously antagonistic to what they stood for, that they would gladly exchange life for life, if need be. They were to be a body of men and women gladly dying that others might live. That was to be the church. That was to be us.

We have been walking these past few months through the pages of the first ten chapters of the gospel of John watching Jesus demonstrate how the life of God looks when it is inhabiting a mere man. It looks like God. Not physically; spiritually. The character of that man becomes a reflection of the character of God. The behavior of that man becomes a mirror, showing in the natural realm how God feels about relationships, offenses, persecution, tribulation, submission and priorities.

It is the mind of God in the body of a man. Living, breathing, hurting, working in the physical realm just like any man or woman. Yet, the spirit of that man is surrendered to the Spirit of God, so that his decisions are not made based on what he feels or desires, but on what God living in him has revealed through His Word and is prompting through His Spirit.

That was the life of Christ: God in a body for 33 years. Now He has returned to His Father and given us His Spirit, and now this same mind can be in us. But there is a choice involved. Otherwise, Paul would not have said, “Let this mind be in you.” It’s not something we do, it’s something we let God do. That is the “exchanged life” in a nutshell: God living in us, doing

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through us what we cannot or would not do ourselves.

We are nearing the end of our pilgrimage through the mind of Christ, though in a very real sense, we never end that pilgrimage. Our study to determine the principles involved, however, is nearing its conclusion. We return now to Philippians, chapter two, and search for how God looks when He dies. It will help us to see how we ought to behave when we are faced with the need to obey, and the consequences are not to our liking.

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Obedient unto death!
Oh, what an awesome phrase,
A thought that ought to cause our hearts
To pour forth songs of praise.

The living God came down to earth
To bear the sins of man,
And so much higher are His ways
So different was His plan.

That God the King who one day soon
Will greet us in the sky,
The first time came to sinful earth
To show us how to die.

And in the process, showing us,
He paid the price for sin,
He threw the gates of heaven wide
And begged us to come in.

A slave He was, no kingly garb
His body was to wear,
He took the form of servanthood
To teach us how to care.

And then one day, the Father said,
"Sin's cost we'll satisfy,
They can come to me and live
But first My Son must die."

Obedient unto death was He
We hear the Scripture say,
For the joy that was set before Him
He gave His life away.

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And so must we. That is the Christian life. It is a life of self-sacrifice. It is a life of selfless giving, unselfish living. It is a life characterized by sensitivity, tenderness, and willful abandonment of that which satisfies the flesh in order to meet the needs of a dying, hurting world.

That kind of church in this kind of society will still turn the world upside down (or right side up, as the case might be). But unless and until we return to a first century concept of New Testament Christianity, it won't happen. The world will continue to see a milk-toast variety of religiosity that pretends to be crucified with Christ, but is in reality feeding its own desire for attention and self-fulfillment through a variety of spiritual activities that, in essence, call attention to themselves, and carry in themselves built-in limitations as to what God can and cannot do with our lives. The key is not learning to sacrifice; the key is learning to obey.

Are most of us obedient unto death? Not hardly. Just what did Paul mean by that phrase? And how can this mind be in us? That is the objective of this study and our title is "Obedient Unto Death".

After many weeks of applying the principles through the life of Christ, we return now to the passage from which this series originated, (Philippians 2:5-8), and we will begin by reading once again:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery
to be equal with God,

but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a
bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled
Himself and became obedient to the point of death
[obedient unto death], even the death of the cross.

(Philippians 2:5-8 NKJV)

We are going to embark on a Scriptural look at the issue of obedience: what it is, what it isn't, what it means, and what it develops in the life of the Christian. This is a subject every Christian ought to want to look into. It is the supreme issue by which God measures your love for Him. It is so difficult for the natural mind to grasp, but God does not measure your love for Him by what you do, by what you say, even by what you give up.

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“to obey is better than sacrifice.”¹ God’s measurement of your love for Him, as we shall see in these next few studies, is simply and clearly based on how quickly and how faithfully and how completely you do what you are told.

In this age of self-reliance, that seems unbelievable. But mark it: God is not impressed with your creative alternatives, but rather with your uncompromising obedience.

What is obedience, anyway? In our generation it has come to be a disturbing word. Many today associate it with weakness or the absence of backbone. Many have removed it from the wedding vows, and renamed it in the marketplace. We don’t “obey” our bosses anymore, we “accommodate” them. Wives don’t obey their husbands anymore, they “consider” them. Children aren’t even expected to “obey” anymore, unless it suits them, because the term indicates to some a loss of self-esteem. Men and women don’t “obey” the government anymore just because it is the government. They obey in areas where the consequences of disobedience are not worth the risk.

People pay their taxes mostly. People obey the speed limit, sort of. Obedience for the sake of honoring God has been lost in the shuffle of twentieth century jargon. And no small wonder. Obedience has been Satan’s prime target since he first fell and decided to play god. His offer to Eve was: “Blind obedience? That makes you a puppet. You decide what’s best for you.” So Eve decided. And she and we have paid the price for her decision.

The root problem is that we don’t understand the definition of obedience, nor do we grasp the distinctives of obedience. Perhaps both need to be looked at before we proceed to draw from God’s Word the patterns and the illustrations of obedience.

First, the definition. The Hebrew word used throughout the Old Testament for “obey” is a word that basically means “to hear and to hearken”. “To pay attention” might be a good substitute. It has the connotation of stopping what you are doing and listening to a set of instructions with an eye to following them implicitly. It is much more than the act of obeying. It involves the attitude of obeying.

The Greek word, *hypēkoos*, used in most New Testament passages translated “obey”, “obedient”, or “obeying” is a word that pierces the heart and goes beyond the behavior. It means:

¹ I Samuel 15:22

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“to hearken submissively”.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the English word we use in all our Bible translations this way:

obedient: submissive to control;

to obey: to carry or comply with a command, order, or request.

Under “synonyms”, the dictionary uses these words: compliant, submissive, amenable. It further defines these words this way: “Refers to acceptance of authority in general. Innate disposition to yield to authority without protest.

So the person who is obedient is not just the one who does what he has to do to get recognized or accepted, even accepted by God. The truly obedient one is the one who has a heart attitude towards authority that is compliant, submissive, and gentle without protesting even in his spirit that he has to obey.

That means you aren’t obeying the speed limit if you are gritting your teeth and defying the concept in your heart. You aren’t obeying your boss if you are muttering under your breath: “What right does he have to treat me this way?” Children aren’t obeying their parents when they clean the dishes with a scowl on their face. Wives aren’t obeying their husbands if they do what he asks, then call their best friend and complain about it.

The story is told about a missionary translator who was struggling to find a word for “obedience”. No such word seemed to exist in the native tongue of the tribe to whom he had been sent. It was a virtue not really present, and a concept not understood. Still, he was praying and searching for some word that would communicate to these people what God wanted from them. One day, as he was returning home from the village, he realized that his trusty dog was not by his side. Turning around, he whistled, and his pet came running full speed, just at the sound of his call. A native standing by, commented, “Your dog is all ear”. Immediately the missionary knew he had his word for obedience.

“All ear for God.” That just might be what that Hebrew word is trying to say when it says to “hear and to hearken”. Obedience is a heart attitude that waits patiently for a word from God, yea that searches diligently for a word from God with a foregone conclusion that whatever that word is, wherever that word takes

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them, they will immediately comply, regardless of the nature of the commandment, because of who the Commander is.”

Sir Leonard Wood once visited the King of France and the king was so pleased with him that he was invited to return the next day. Upon his return, however, the king greeted him questioningly.

“Why, Sir Leonard, I did not expect to see you here. What made you come?”

“Did you not invite me, Sir?” Sir Leonard responded.

“Yes,” the king replied, “but you did not answer my invitation, so I did not expect you.”

Sir Leonard’s response is a classic.

He answered, “Sir, A king’s invitation is not to be answered, but to be obeyed.”

That’s the mind of one who is properly under authority. It was the mind of Christ as He walked this earth 2,000 years ago. “He did always those things that pleased the Father.” He literally lived for His Father’s command, always obeyed His Father’s instructions. Always. Never once did He say, “But Father, I don’t want to do that!” or, “Father, give me another choice. I want to do your will, but that’s too hard.” No, He simply obeyed. And the more difficult His life became, the more obedient He became. How do we know that? Hebrews 5:8 says,

though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (NKJV)

So the obedient one is the one who has a heart attitude that is so submissive to authority that it is only natural to follow orders implicitly, orders from God because of who He is, and orders from those placed over him, because the powers that be are ordained of God, so those orders come from God as well.

Obedience. It is the touchstone of spirituality. You can be a student of the Bible, even a teacher of the Bible, and not be obedient. You can pour your life into other lives and still not be obedient. You can give away money until you are known for your philanthropic endeavors, and still not be obedient. If there is an area in your life where you are specifically, willfully denying God His way, you are not being obedient. And the money you give or the works you do or the ministry you have is no substitute for

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that obedience.

We will be looking in the weeks to come at how God views one solitary area of disobedience in an otherwise spiritual life. We'll look at twenty or so blessings of God that are guaranteed to the life that lies in a state of submissive readiness to do God's bidding. And we'll look at some of the Biblical illustrations of men and women the Scripture says were "obedient". Finally, we'll look at what it means to be "obedient unto death". Then, God willing, we'll take a look at why "God exalted Him and gave Him a name which was above every name," and how that exaltation affects us.

For today, however, we must close by looking at only two issues: What our disobedience says to God, and how to determine our own "OQ" or "obedience quotient".

We serve a God of love. He is not waiting in the wings, wringing His Holy hands, hoping we will somehow fall into sin so He can exercise judgment and punish us. Our sin cost God the life of His Son. It brings about in Him, not glee, but grief; not a desire for retaliation, but restoration. Having paid such a price for our redemption, His only desire is that we repent and be restored into the fullness of fellowship that He intended for us in eternity past.

When your child strays from the path and ends up in utter rebellion and begins to behave in a manner that brings reproach to God's name, you are not filled with glee. You are not excited that there might be a chance to catch him in his sin and punish him publicly. What do you do? You move quietly into your prayer closet and weep over his rebellion. You cry out to God for mercy for him. Your heart breaks at the pain and reproach his sin is costing him. There is no joy in your heart, only grief. One you love has gone astray.

Can you imagine, then, how God feels when we continually disobey in the very same areas of our lives? When, like the children of Israel, we defy His love, confess it, are forgiven, then rush out to do it again? His anger is a holy anger. It is not directed at us, but at the sin, and at the source of the sin, Satan himself. He longs for us to repent. He weeps over our misery and over the effects our sin is having or will have in the lives of others. He loves us too much to enjoy the discipline He is sending into our lives to draw us back to Himself. His only

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desire is that we repent and return to His side.

We must understand that. God's righteousness demands obedience, but God's mercy refuses to cast us aside when we disobey. Oh, what a God we have. Perhaps the thing we do not realize, is just what we are saying when we disobey.

Each time we disobey the known will of God, we are saying to God: "I do not like who you are. Therefore, I will not allow your nature to control my life." To understand that, we must come to see every violation of God's will as a violation of God's character. When we lie, we are not simply choosing to disobey a commandment of God, we are nullifying a part of His nature. We are saying, "I do not want to belong to a God of truth." God is truth. He cannot lie. So every lie we tell is a broadcast to the world about us that though God claims to be truth, He in us is not. We defy His character. We deny His name. That is the nature of willful disobedience.

Immoral thoughts and acts are not just subtle excursions into the world of fantasy or behavior that break God's heart because we slipped. They break God's heart because they openly defy God's nature. God is holy.

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy
(1 Peter 1:15,16 NIV)

Why? To prove something to God? No, to acknowledge God's nature in us. Every impure thought we think defies God's holiness and places Christ on that cross again, defending our rebellion to His nature.

We are to "love our neighbors as ourselves"² because God is love. We are to "redeem the time"³ because God is eternal. We are to "in everything give thanks"⁴ because God is sovereign. We are to "judge not that we be not judged"⁵ because God is righteous. We are to "fear not, neither be afraid"⁶ because God is omnipresent. We are to "forgive one another as Christ forgave us" because God is mercy. We are to "meditate day and night

² Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19, 22:39

³ Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:8

⁵ Matthew 7:1

⁶ Isaiah 44:8

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on God's Word that we may observe to do all that is written therein"⁷ because God is wisdom.

Every one of God's commandments, both positive and negative, are linked to some aspect of His nature. His laws are only reflections of His character, and when we defy His commandments, we trample underfoot who He is and what He stands for. That is what breaks His precious heart.

If only we could learn, each time we think an impure thought, to stop and cry out to God: "I hate your holiness. Your nature is not perfect. I hereby choose to defy you." Then we would at least be honest. If every time we thought or said a lie we could stop and say to God: "I hate you for being perfect truth. I prefer to serve Satan, the father of lies," at least we would be up front with God and with ourselves. But we justify disobedience by convincing ourselves that we really love God and worship Him for all He is. It's just that we are human, and He never expected us to be perfect, and He is a God of grace, so He understands and even expects us to willfully live in sin.

Negative. He is holy. He lives in us. What He expects of us is progressive holiness. He is truth. He lives in us. What He expects of us is a life of unwavering honesty, with a growing hatred for all that defiles His nature through lying or dishonest conduct. His nature is at stake, and His nature is revealed through His name. Therefore, we deny His name every time we willfully continue to disobey in any area of our lives. That is why Jesus said so clearly in John 14:15,

"If you love me, you will obey what I command." (NIV)

If...you will. Obedience is not a sign of our strength; it is a sign of our love. The strength comes from God when we choose to ask for it. Therefore, the glory goes to God when we are able to resist the devil and draw nigh unto God. Every act of disobedience glorifies some aspect of Satan's personality. Every act of obedience honors some aspect of God's nature. Mark it. It is true. And therein ought to lie our motivation to obey.

As we pursue this subject, we are going to have to search our own hearts for those areas where we constantly resist His Word. We need to find our own "OQ" (obedience quotient). Strangely enough, it may not be as evident as you think. Ask yourself these three questions for starters:

⁷ Joshua 1:8

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1- How often do I search the Word asking God to point out areas of disobedience? (And mean it.) How often do I earnestly and honestly pray:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties [thoughts];

And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23,24 NKJV)

Remember, obedience is a heart attitude that seeks out submissively to be under authority. Which brings us to issue two:

2- How quickly and how humbly do I respond to those in authority over me: husband, boss, police, laws, spiritual leadership? Is my natural response to rebuke or correction, justification or repentance? If “the powers that be are ordained of God”⁸ and obedience is an outgrowth of submission, a physical, visible picture of our hearts can best be seen by how we respond to the external, physical authorities God places over us, especially to those Peter describes as “unjust authorities” in I Peter 2.

3- How easily do I justify continual transgressions? Do I tend to sin over and over in the same areas? If so, do I justify that sin by presumptuously claiming the grace of God? Do I defy Paul’s answer to the question?

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

Certainly not! (Romans 6:1,2a NKJV)

We live in a world that defies the concept of obedience on the grounds that man was designed to be a puppet or a slave. Too bad. That makes Jesus weak. That makes the gospel foolishness. That makes obedient Christians fools of the highest order. Man was designed in the image of God. That means He was designed to be a reflector of God’s nature, not a demonstrator of his own. Jesus came “not to do mine own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”⁹ That means He came simply to obey. And He in us today will do no less.

I beg you, do not pursue this subject with me unless you want to be changed. God’s goal is singular: the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ is this: That we become obedient unto death.

⁸ Romans 13:1

⁹ John 6:38

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OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH (Part 2)

Obedient unto death
Let this, we pursue:
Progressive obedience.
That when life is through

We can but whisper
In our dying breath,
“By God’s grace, I’ve been...
Obedient unto death.”

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