

Humble Obedience

John 3:29-36

How would you define the concept of "obedience"? And what does "obedience" look like within your personality and within your behaviors. Is obedience done grudgingly or is it done humbly?

Let's begin our study today by reading these precious words given to us here in John chapter 3. And let's find out what real "humble obedience" looks like within the life and the behavior of John the Baptist.

Here, beginning in verse 29, John tells us that

²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:29-30)

Some days ago, as I was pondering these words of our Lord, I was captivated by the statement that Jesus made about this man, John the Baptist. There in the Book of Matthew chapter 11 Jesus said,

¹¹ I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:11)

Folks, that has to be one of the highest compliments given to any man in all of scripture. When we compare the short life of John to such men as Abraham and Moses and David, that compliment seems almost out of place.

John was not at all like Abraham or Moses or David. John was truly "odd". He lived in the desert, dressed in camel hair clothing, ate locusts and wild honey.

John wasn't elegant in speech like David. David wrote and sang beautiful poetry.

And God didn't hand John a stone tablet of laws. And God didn't make John the Father of nations and give him descendants that outnumber the stars in the sky.

But yet, John was highly honored by God with the compliment,

¹¹I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:11)

Why would Jesus, the very God who made every man and woman on the earth, say these words?

The reasons, I'm sure, are many fold. But remembering that everything we have in this life comes as a "good and perfect gift from God the Father", the compliment might have had some to do with the position and the calling that John was to carry out, that of being the one person who would stand between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant announcing that "Grace" and "Mercy" now had come to mankind through the salvation that Jesus would provide.

Yes, there were prophets before John and preachers would come after him who would present Jesus to the world, but John the Baptist was given the privilege of being the first.

So then, perhaps the special compliment about John had especially to do with the gifted position that God had given John to fulfill.

For myself though, I believe that at least a part of the answer to our question as to why John was so honored by the Lord Jesus as being the "greatest among men" is revealed to us in these few simple words spoken by John here in verse 29 of our passage. Those words,

²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:29-30)

Did you hear these words, dear Christian? Did you hear them plainly? These are possibly some of the most meaningful words ever uttered by a man. Why? Why are these words so very meaningful? It's because, these words bespeak "profound humility". "Humility", the "complete opposite" of all that separates men and angels from God.

Oh dear Christian, please know that "Humility" is the one character quality that will unite you and me with the person of Christ. We know that because of His plea to us in the words of Matthew chapter 11 where He said,

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am humble and meek,
and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is
light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Did you hear His words? He is "humble and meek" and He wants you and me to be "humble and meek" like Him. And if we are "humble and meek" like Him, all of the rest of His character and purposes will fill our hearts and minds and we will become like Him! Isn't that an amazing promise?

And here, from John's words, we can see that he, John the Baptist, was filled with the humility of the Lord Jesus, wanting only what the Lord Jesus wanted.

And because of that, it was no stretch of a compliment to say that "among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."

Please bear with me for a moment as I say these words again for us. In His humility, this man, John the Baptist was truly "one with Christ". He had no greater desire than to simply and completely do the will of God, no agenda of his own, no wants or desires of his own. His only purpose in life was to simply and completely do the will of God.

And Jesus also invites you and me to come unto Him and to join Him in His yoke, to learn of Him for He is "humble and meek".

And we need to understand that when our Lord uses repeat expressions like these together, here "humble and meek", He wants us to understand the importance and the exactness of His meaning, that His humility is pure and unsullied holiness with no element or essence of "pride" within it.

Our Lord is "Humble" beyond measure. And in these words, we see that John the Baptist had joined Him in His humility. And again yes, He is calling for you and me to join with Him also.

May we pause here for a moment and ask a question? Remembering always that these precious words of scripture are written for us by God's Holy Spirit, "Why does the Holy Spirit interject these words of instruction about humility into these particular events that are taking place?"

May I suggest that it is because of this matter of “pride” and its enormous impact and control within most every person's daily life and behavior. And again, yes, is perhaps the greatest hindrance in our relationship with our Lord.

Folks, we, you and I, and most everyone we know on the face of this earth are not humble. We are not humble! We are proud! And again, yes “pride” is the chief obstacle that separates us, you and me, from God.

If we were to address the question, “Is there any one sin that is more sinful than any other sin?” We would want to say no, all sin is equal, each form of sin deserving of death and hell. And that would be true.

But dear friends, the sin of “pride”, this diametrically opposite concept of “humility”, sure seems to occupy a level of sin all its own.

Again yes, all sin does violate the holiness of God and deserves the penalty of eternal hell. But the sin of “pride” seems to stand out in these scriptures as the “captain” of all the other sins.

As I've read through the history provided in the scriptures, it's evident that pride has not only reigned supreme as the dominant form of sin, it has also shown itself to be the foundational basis for many of the other sins that men and angels have ever committed.

Beginning all the way back with the very first sin that God recorded in the scriptures, pride has sought to win and control the heart of every creature. Listen to these words given in Isaiah 14! This is the first known sin.

¹²How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! ¹³For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: ¹⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isaiah 14:12-14)

Can you not hear the sin of “pride” flowing throughout all those words.

Also, in the Book of Job, chapter 41, this same Archangel, Satan is portrayed as a violent Leviathan, enraged with the sin of pride, wanting to control everything and wanting to lead others into the sin of pride. Listen!

³³ "Nothing on earth is like him,
One made without fear.
³⁴ "He looks on everything that is high;
He is king over all the sons of pride." (Job 41:33-34)

How does the sin of pride usually manifest itself in people like you and me? The explanation that I like best and the one that I have shared with you often in the past is the one that comes from Oswald Chambers. He describes the sin of pride as being, "My claim to my right to myself". "My claim to my right to myself"!

You can hear those very words resounding in the rebellious proclamation of satan when he said,

¹³ . . . I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: ¹⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isaiah 14:13-14)

Satan is filled with the sin of pride and he is "King over all the sons of pride". And He has sought since the beginnings of the earth to instill that same pride in the heart of every man and woman that has ever been born.

He began with Eve in the Garden, and then Adam, and then Cain and then on and on.

Every man and woman on the earth is born with the innate sense of pride, born with the desire to demand claim to our right to our self. No one is exempt. No one can escape the sin of pride. Pride is resident within our very genetic makeup.

If then, we are born filled with the plague of sinful pride. And if that sinful pride is fed daily by the "king of pride", how can weak and feeble "you and me" ever hope to find relief?

We know the first portion of the answer to that question already. The first portion of the answer is, "Salvation through Jesus Christ". And it is my hope that each one who is listening to these words today has made that life-giving decision.

But we also know that there is a second portion to that answer. It's because we know that when we got saved we were not immediately healed of our sin of pride. Pride seems to be able to hold onto its seat in the government of our lives.

Yes, salvation does begin to make that change in us. But before our battle with pride can be fully engaged within us, there needs to be something more required of you and me.

My dear friends, I confess, I don't particularly like the way that God arranged this whole process. It is the most difficult thing that I could ever undertake. I would prefer that God would have simply washed me and made me clean of my sin of pride. But in His wisdom, He has decided differently.

In 1st Thessalonians chapter 4 our Lord tells us simply that, "this is the will of God, your sanctification". Simple words, but profound, "this is the will of God, your sanctification".

And yes, In His wisdom God has ordained that you and I must actively participate in that life-long process that brings about our "sanctification". We must yield our will to His will in all the matters of life.

It is our most difficult of all struggles as believers, to give up our claim to our right to ourselves. So, how do we do that? How do we die to self? How do we give up this incessant claim within us that demands that we keep our claim to our right to ourselves? How do we surrender all of our demands to the power of Christ on the cross?

The answer begins here in Philippians 2,

⁵ Have this mind in you, which is in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:5-11)

When Jesus became a man, as unbelievable as it may seem, He was confronted by most all of the same challenges that you and I are faced with.

Satan himself tempted Jesus to give up His humble and meek character and to become the proud ruler over all the earth.

But instead, Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8-8)

Oh dear Christian, this is the answer. This is the one and only setoff to pride. Jesus “humbled Himself and became Obedient”. “Obedience” and “humility” working together as one, to carry out the will of God. And this is the answer, the only answer!

Humility” first says, “I have neither the place, the position, nor authority to do that which I want to do and am tempted to do”. And, “Obedience” follows by saying, “Although I may want to do this thing that I am tempted to do, I will instead simply choose not to do it”.

What a simple sounding answer. And it is simple! And it is the answer. But in the stressful circumstances of daily life it becomes an almost impossible response.

I had a close friend whose marriage teetered on the edge of divorce. He wanted his marriage to work. But the temptations he encountered were powerful on his soul. And the reality was, he really liked and enjoyed the things he was being tempted with. And because of that, he simply did not have the resolve to carry out the obedient humility required of a Godly husband. And his family and his marriage fell apart.

Each day, you and I are faced with some of those same kinds of opportunities and challenges, in our families and in our workplaces, opportunities and challenges that demand obedient humility. And the question is, “Can we respond with humble obedience?”

And the answer is, "Yes, we can!" "We can"! We may not believe that we can, but we can. We can because it is God Himself that has given us everything that we need to be able to do it.

That promise is given to us clearly in the Book of 2 Peter chapter 1 where we are told,

³His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.(2 Peter 1:3-4)

Oh dear friends listen carefully. These words are true and they are absolute, a "rock solid" promise from God. But listen! They do have a requirement of us, you and me, within them. These are words that are only possible with those of us who have truly given our hearts to our Lord in Salvation, those who are truly surrendered to the Lord Jesus and have the power of His Holy Spirit living within us.

Let me say that again. Yes, our Lord has given us everything we need for life and Godliness. And He has especially given us the gift of being able to "humbly obey" Him during those onslaughts of temptations and desires. But that sweet gift is only given to those of us who have surrendered our hearts to Him in salvation.

This is basic gospel folks, "basic gospel"! But in times of stress and temptation, we need to remind ourselves of its blessed benefits.

In our salvation, the Holy Spirit of Christ came to live and abide within our heart and soul. And as he did that, He brought with Him His special abilities and guidance, the ability to discern good from evil, right from wrong, to know when we are being tempted to think and to do and to say things that are wrong.

And no, sometimes, perhaps most times, that "turning away" from a temptation is not easy. It can be very, very hard. But still we have all the ability we need.

Let me say these words again before we close for today because this is so very, very important.

Our response to the stresses and the temptations of our day cannot be one garnered up through our human abilities. Counting to ten might seem to help, but it most often does not work. And neither does any of your secular therapist's good ideas.

It is God and God alone who has the only answer during our times of stress and temptation. As we received His salvation of our souls, we also received the presence of His Holy Spirit. And His Holy Spirit has given us everything, “everything”, “everything” that we need, especially “humble obedience”, to respond to any and all of those difficulties that we encounter in our day.

In those moments, surrender your heart and remember these words,

The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:5-7)

Pray with me.