

SALVATION AND OBEDIENCE

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The cry of the Philippian jailer epitomizes the longing of men and women since the entrance of sin, "What must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30)? Over the centuries the answer to this question has varied greatly. As a result, obedience has taken on many forms, from appeasement of an angry God to accumulation of merit for entrance into heaven. Some have even denied the need for obedience altogether.¹ Therefore, the answer to the question of how obedience relates to salvation becomes an extremely relevant one and needs to be Biblically sound.

From the Scriptures we know that even prior to sin, obedience was a condition for retaining life (Gen 2:16, 17).² The Lord said, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:16, 17, NRSV). After the entrance of sin, the Lord still expected obedience. We see this in His question to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:6, 7, NRSV).

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb 11:8, NRSV). Centuries later, David acknowledged the role of obedience in salvation when he said, "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread. They are like trees planted by streams of waters, which yield their fruit in its season. The wicked

are not so, therefore they will not stand in the judgment, for the Lord watches over the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (Psalm 1:1-6, NRSV). The prophet Ezekiel, speaking for the Lord, said, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live" (Ezek 33:11, NRSV).

In the Gospels we find the rich young ruler asking Jesus, "Teacher what good deed must I do to have eternal life? He said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments'" (Matt 19:16, 17, NRSV). Again, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15, NRSV). And, "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14, NRSV).

In the epistles Paul stated, "To those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury" (Rom 2:7, 8, NRSV). In the book of Revelation, John said, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev 22:14, 15, NRSV).

One cannot read the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation and dismiss the importance of obedience as it relates to salvation. We need to examine this relationship more closely.

Edenic and Post-Edenic Obedience

In Genesis the Lord told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree that was in the midst of the garden (Gen 2:16, 17; 3:3). The positive side of this injunction was that there could be no character development without a test.³ The negative side of it was that Adam and Eve could die (Gen 2:17). God had decided to test their love for Him by making eternal life contingent upon obedience (Gen 3:22).⁴ We see this in the fact that, after they sinned, the Lord expelled them from the Garden of Eden lest they eat of the Tree of Life and live forever (Gen 3:22). But before He did so, He again offered them eternal life through the death of His Son (Gen 3:15), but not without expecting a response of obedience. Once outside the Gar-

den Adam and Eve would come to its entrance not only to worship but also to renew their vows of obedience.⁵

This raises a number of questions. How is it possible for fallen human beings to obey? Prior to sin Adam and Eve were under a covenant of obedience, for both were perfect and could rightly be expected to obey. After they sinned they were placed under the covenant of grace, yet they were still expected to obey. Prior to the entrance of sin they were in perfect harmony with God. After they sinned their powers were perverted; their natures became evil; they were in harmony with Satan and would have remained so had God not specially intervened.⁶ As the Scripture says, "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey" (Rom 6:16, NRSV)? The instant the first pair sinned, Christ stepped in to rescue them. He promised to come and die as man's substitute.⁷

It is Christ who enables us to obey (1 Cor 10:13; Jude 24, 25). Prior to sin, obedience was the condition for receiving eternal life. After sin obedience became a grateful response to God for having saved him from his enslavement to sin, but obedience is still a condition for receiving eternal life.⁸

How do we reconcile obedience as a condition for eternal life with the statement of Paul when he says, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23, NRSV); and with John when he says, "God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11, 12, NRSV)? The answer to this apparent enigma lies in the fact that having accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior from sin; having been justified as legitimate recipients of eternal life; and having a right standing before God in spite of our sinful natures, we can retain our Christ-centered status only by continual obedience.⁹

The gift of eternal life through Christ is not permanent as if there were no condition to salvation. It is not once saved always saved. As Paul says, "We are justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom 5:1, 2, NRSV). This kind of obedience is not merely outward conformity to a cold external

standard, but a personal relationship with the living Christ through a faith that willingly reveals itself in joyful obedience and fulfills the condition of eternal life as a permanent gift.

Covenant Obedience

When Moses came down from Sinai he brought with him a law written by the finger of God (Exod 31:18). If the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant and had the law written on their hearts and in their minds, it would not have been necessary to proclaim the law at Sinai.¹⁰ But the law had to be given to make sin more explicitly recognizable and obedience more explicitly necessary (Rom 5:12-14). At Sinai the Lord also spoke to His people and said, "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession" (Exod 19:5, NRSV).

Covenant obedience is more than mere human morality. Human decency does not obligate people to undertake the rigors of discipleship and loyalty to Christ. It only requires them to do what needs to be done to be human. Common morality acceptable to a civilized society does not make one a Christian. Christian morality is housed in the covenant which God made with His people in the desert.¹¹

The law of God at Sinai was not the creation of man's own thinking. Israel did not invent their moral code in the wilderness. It came down from heaven. Man is silent at Sinai. Only the voice of God is heard. No prophet speaks here. No human genius is lecturing on ethics. Israel established no school of philosophy from which they finally developed their own ethical system. God led Israel away from the culture and advanced civilization in Egypt in order that they should hear His voice. For us also, everything depends on our believing that God Himself spoke at Sinai, that these Ten Commandments are not the words of men.¹²

As ABC Nightline moderator, Ted Koppel said in his address to the faculty and students at Duke University:

We have actually convinced ourselves that slogans will save us. Shoot up if you must, but use a clean needle. Enjoy sex whenever and with whomever you wish, but wear a condom. No! The answer is no. Not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might end up in jail or dying in an AIDS ward, but no because it's wrong, because we have

spent 5,000 years as a race of rational human beings, trying to drag ourselves out of the primeval slime by searching for truth and moral absolutes. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder. It is a howling reproach. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not Ten Suggestions.¹³

As Edward Heppenstall points out:

When men deny and reject the commandments given at Sinai, then it becomes possible not only to disobey them, but to believe that they should be changed and adapted to every generation and situation. If the Ten Commandments are merely ways in which people found it convenient to act at different times, then they have very little authority. They have no binding force in the life. One opinion is as good as another. Man can therefore do as he likes. There is no ultimate authority once revelation is denied.¹⁴

The law given at Sinai as the basis for the covenant together with the instructions on salvation and obedience were not mere accommodations God made to Israel. We find no indication in the gospels and the teachings of Christ that the covenant or any part of the Old Testament having to do with salvation and obedience was simply a metaphoric accommodation on the part of God to the ignorance of Israel. The Accommodation Theory begun by J. S. Semler in the 1700's under his rationalistic position called "liberalis theologia" says that the way the atonement was explained was merely an accommodation to Jewish thought-forms and is therefore without validity for later ages; even Christ's words were deliberate adjustments to the ideas and beliefs of contemporary Judaism.¹⁵

It is true that the Scripture is communicated to the human mind so that men and women can assimilate it.¹⁶ But, as Bernard Ramm says,

To liberalism accommodation was the evisceration or enervation of the doctrinal content of the Bible by explaining doctrinal passages as accommodations to the thought-patterns of the times of the Biblical writers. . . . liberals asserted that the Scriptures were not only accommodated in form but also in matter or content. . . . The atonement as a vicarious sacrifice is a way in which first-century Christians thought of the cross, but it is asserted, we are not bound today to think of the cross in that manner.¹⁷

According to the accommodation theory, Paul's understanding of soteriology was conditioned by what he was taught and he, too, accommodated his words to the ideas and beliefs of the Jews. To carry this concept link by link down the chain of logic, Luther's concept of salvation in turn was influenced by Paul and continued this accommodation, and to a certain extent Ellen White's concepts of salvation are accommodations, except that she adds the larger dimension of the Great Controversy. This kind of reasoning leaves the Scripture open to any hermeneutic or a priori principle of relativity which man may wish to impose on Scripture. But God does not double-talk when He speaks in Scripture.

When Jesus came,

He did not leave His hearers to conclude that He had come to set aside its [the law's] requirements He said nothing to unsettle their faith in the religion and institutions that had been committed to them through Moses. Christ Himself had given both the moral and the ceremonial law. He did not come to destroy confidence in His own instruction. It was because of His great reverence for the law and the prophets that He sought to break through the wall of traditional requirements which hemmed in the Jews. While He set aside their false interpretations of the law, He carefully guarded His disciples against yielding up the vital truths committed to the Hebrews.¹⁸

Christ Himself gave the law at Sinai (Neh 9:12-15). It formed the heart of the Hebrew life and worship. The massive indictments that prophets like Isaiah and Amos brought against the people centered on the failure to live up to what the Decalogue required. And when Jesus came to fulfill the law, he fulfilled this law. He set it anew on its foundations of faith and love and restored it to its rightful place.¹⁹ There is no difference between obeying Christ, keeping the covenant, and obeying the law. Christ-centered obedience is covenant obedience.

What is covenant obedience?

1. Covenant obedience is obedience sparked by grace through the power of Jesus Christ.²⁰ It is not an obedience generated by man.

2. Covenant obedience springs from character transformation, not from behavior modification.²¹ Formal education and training, culture, and human effort are all helpful, but they cannot purify the springs of life. For humans to think that all that needs to be

done is to develop the good that is in them by nature is a fatal deception. There must be a power from the outside, a new life from above, and that power is Jesus Christ. He is the only One who can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and purify the springs of life.²² Only when this has taken place and one has been born again can the heart render obedience that the covenant calls for and make it acceptable to God (John 3:1-10).

3. Covenant obedience is accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is not a desire for goodness and holiness, as important as this may be.²³ This was the problem with Judas. He loved Christ. He felt a desire to be changed in character and life. He felt in his own person the evidence of Christ's power. He recognized the teaching of Christ as superior to all he had ever heard. But he never submitted to the divine molding; instead he held on to his own judgment and his own opinions.²⁴

4. Covenant obedience is the response of a grateful heart for what Jesus Christ has done for us. Our hope is not in ourselves; it is in Christ.²⁵ Covenant obedience is not accepting salvation offered by Christ and then thinking that we have to prove to the Lord that of ourselves we can obey before we can claim his blessings.²⁶ Such obedience is worth nothing.²⁷

5. Covenant obedience accepts personal responsibility for sin. It is not above accountability to God. Paul says, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of God" (Rom 14:10). And Solomon says, "My child, beware. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Eccl 12:13, 14, NSRV).

Unfortunately, the covenant made at Sinai is often misunderstood and the failure of the Israelites is often used to show that obedience is impossible. The obedience that the Israelites promised to render God was a response of human endeavor without the Lord's strengthening grace. "Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do" (Exod 24:3, KJV). The conditions of the covenant were repeated. Again the people said, "All that the Lord hath said we will do."²⁸ Forty days

later they turned to worshiping the golden calf (Exod 32), and the covenant was disannulled.²⁹

There is no provision in the divine plan of salvation to save man from sin by a dispensation of law based on man's inability. There has never been any other means of salvation except through Christ. At Sinai the fault was in the human heart and in the belief that if one would promised to keep the law, one could keep it purely on one's own strength.³⁰ Covenant obedience, however, springs from divine grace. And such obedience is possible. "God has given no commandments which cannot be obeyed."³¹ If obedience under the power of divine grace were not possible, then grace is not grace and God is not the God of Israel.

Corporate Obedience

Throughout the centuries God has invited His people to come to Him in faith, accept His covenant, and enter His rest, which as a people they failed to do (Heb 3:7-19). God offered them a new covenant, new to them because it would be written by God on their hearts.³² "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:31-34, NRSV).

Even a cursory look at the prophets gives us a glimpse into the pains of a loving God continually appealing to His people to give their hearts to Him. Repeatedly, the Lord warned His people against disobedience. "You pretend to worship me, and yet you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are safe!' only to go on doing all these same things" (see Jeremiah 7:4, 8-10). Again and again the Lord urged His people to come to Him and He would help them obey.

To Jeremiah He said, "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, 'Obey my voice.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will" (Jer 11:1-8, NRSV). "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone. Turn, then, and live" (Ezek 18:30-32, NRSV).

As Paul says, "If the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" (Heb 2:2, 3, NRSV).

Christ did not come to release us from the obligations of the covenant. He came to establish the covenant, not abolish it (cf. Matt 5:17). He came to magnify the law and make it honorable (Isa 42:21). He fulfilled the conditions of the covenant by His perfect obedience and ratified it by His death. As Isaiah says, "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. He was brought as lamb to the slaughter and cut off out of the land of the living. For the transgression of my people was He stricken. Yet it pleased the Lord to make Him an offering for sin" (see Isa 53:4-10).

It was not without suffering that Christ carried out the Father's will and obeyed (Heb 5:7, 8). It was with strong crying and tears that He obtained our salvation. He earned our righteousness by His works in order that our righteousness might be of faith, a faith that is shown by works (James 2:18). To say that obedience as a response of love is unnecessary, or to teach that man cannot keep the commandments, or that works have nothing to do with our redemption is twisting Scripture. There is a vast difference between

servile and free obedience. Free obedience takes place when the heart and will are in harmony with the divine command. Its prototype is the perfect submission of the Son to the Father, which we see in the willing eagerness of Christ to do the Father's will.³³ That so-called faith that releases men from the obligation of obedience is not faith, but presumption on God's mercy and love.³⁴ The human mind is capable of justifying anything the human heart wants to do (Jer 17:9). Human logic has the uncanny ability to dress up man's reasoning and make the Scriptures say what man wants them to say.

We are not saved by obedience, but neither can we be saved without it.³⁵ While it is true that our obedience merits nothing, there are results issuing from salvation. While no one is saved by works, it is impossible for one to be saved without works.³⁶ It is incumbent upon us to keep the covenant of obedience given to Adam in Eden, and renewed to Abraham, again offered under the terms of the covenant to Israel at Sinai, and ratified by Jesus Christ on Calvary, not in order to be saved but because we are saved. Biblical obedience is an ethic of response. It is an act of gratitude and obligation for the Lord's providence and grace.³⁷

Paul says, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:2-4, KJV). If faith does not manifest itself in works, it is not faith. James says, "I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18, KJV). Paul encourages his converts to obey and says, "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it (1 Cor 10:13, NRSV). John says, "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12, NSRV).

Obedience in the New Testament

In the Greek mystery religions and in Gnosticism the emphasis was placed on seeing rather than on hearing. It was believed that hearing leads men astray. True mysteries, they said, are known by sight and the climax of such special insight is vision. Judaism had an entirely different emphasis. Visions, they said, are in and of themselves dangerous. The important thing is to hear, to hear the word. In the books of Moses the emphasis is given to the relationship between hearing and doing. The entire Old Testament is replete with, "Hear ye the word of the Lord." True seeking is hearing, hearing that leads to action in obedience. This same relationship between hearing and doing is carried over into the New Testament. Jesus expounds the will of God as revealed in the law. His word is the same word that He spoke to Israel. For Christ, faith was not simply a matter of hearing, but also obeying. His relationship with His Father has its deepest roots in hearing and doing by God's enabling power.³⁸

We receive what the Lord has said by listening. The real mark of listening is a faith that issues in obedience. It is by obedient listening that we appropriate the content of what is written. Every message given to the seven churches in Revelation ends with, "Anyone who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Revelation 2 and 3). God meets us in His word and charges us to listen to His word, which must be heard and followed. Israel became known as people of the law, a people who were supposed to listen in order to render obedience to the word they heard.³⁹

Biblical hearing is a single response which needs to be understood from three points of view. It involves the physical sense of listening to the word; it demands that the hearer respond in faith; and it includes obedient action prompted by faithfulness to and faith in the God who has revealed Himself. Not to respond in obedient action is tantamount to unbelief. If obedience is the response of faith, then disobedience is a sign of the absence of faith.⁴⁰ Failing to obey is willful disobedience on the part of the one who has heard. It is a sin to have listened and heard and then not to obey.

Repeatedly Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." He was not only asking people to listen to Him in the physical sense,

but to respond with faith that obeys. As He said, "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock" (Matt 7:24). "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17, NRSV). The Lord said, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27, NRSV).

The New Testament knows nothing of lawless believers in Christ. The early believers, as Carl Henry says, were not delivered from an obligation to obey the divine precepts. No believer is left to work out his salvation by the principle of love alone without some external guidance from divine revelation. The life of love which Christ taught is centered in the God of love who has revealed His will and given us His law and the objective guidance needed to know what constitutes a Christian ethic.

Too often, however, Christians see the life of love and the life of law as antithetical. They say that love cannot be commanded. Therefore, conformity to commandments of any kind is assumed to be legalistic. They want to be spiritual and see being spiritual as something beyond law-keeping. The fact is, that the Ten Commandments as well as the two-commandment summary of them that Jesus gave are all cast in "thou shalt."⁴¹ The Ten Words enunciated on Sinai contain the essential principles of righteousness that mirror the pure character of a holy God. Their explicitness sets forth a morality of permanent universal obligation. They stand apart from all temporal commands in scriptural revelation and are valid for all men in all places and at all times.⁴²

When God commands: 'thou shalt not commit adultery,' He actually wills that adultery should not be committed, in the solid everyday sense in which the word is used by everyone. This is what God wills, this is what His Commandment means; only it means infinitely more than this, and it is this 'infinitely more' that remains hidden from the eyes of the Pharisee, the legalistic person . . . Man in his divine origin, man who has been created in the image of God, is the truly responsible man . . . [and] true responsibility is identical with this love, which is grounded in the love of God. In this love alone can man fulfil the destiny of his creation; in this love alone does he live and act responsibly towards his Creator; since he knows that he is bound in this way to his neighbor, and since he makes this bond the law of his life, he is a truly *human* being.⁴³

Donald Bloesch says that there are two dangers that man must guard against. One is the Scylla of legalism and rigorism and the other is the Charybdis of antinomianism. But the ethics of the divine command unites law and grace, the indicative and the imperative. It shows us that we can live the authentic Christian life in obedience to the power of crucified love as seen in Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ Works-righteousness is an ever present danger. There is the idea that a certain degree of holiness is a necessary condition for justification. This is impossible. But there does need to be a breakthrough to victorious living.⁴⁵

There are always those who would misconstrue the meaning of obedience and think that in order to be saved they must do some part of the work alone. But every such effort must fail.⁴⁶ On the other hand, while it is true that salvation is a free gift, obedience tests our love to our Father in heaven just as it tested Adam's love in the Garden of Eden. Grateful obedience for what Christ has done may take on many forms. It may be as profound as the obedience of Paul or as simple as the obedient response we see of the thief on the cross, who rebuked his friend for deriding Christ and then turned to the Lord and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:39-43, NRSV).

Whatever form of grateful response obedience takes, there is no effortless Christianity. Activity is the very condition of life. "Those who endeavor to maintain Christian life by passively accepting the blessings that come through the means of grace, and do nothing for Christ, are simply trying to live by eating without working. And in the spiritual as in the natural world, this always results in degeneration and decay."⁴⁷

Obedience and Freedom

Freedom in Christ excludes the right of disobedience to exist. Christ stripped sin of any such rights. He came and died to set us free to obey. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law

might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:1-4, NRSV). Salvation is not simply a forensic transaction to declare us righteous in spite of our sin, but to save us from sin and the slavery of the law as a means of salvation which also is sin. Salvation leads us into free and whole-hearted obedience.

Christ died not only to pay the debt of our sin, but to transform us into His likeness. This involves more than a simple change of behavior. No one can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. Can a leopard change its spots? Then how can you do good who by nature are evil (Jer 13:23)? It is not enough to perceive the loving-kindness of God, to see His benevolence, the fatherly tenderness of His character, or the justice of His law and acknowledge that it is established on eternal principles. Man is still carnal. There must be a power working from within, a new life implanted from above, before we can be saved from the power of sin, and that power is Jesus Christ. Only His grace can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul.⁴⁸

Without such inward change there is no experiential evidence that grace is real, that it really works. If we are good only after we have been transported to heaven, how do we know that we have been genuinely changed and our behavior is not due to more pleasant surroundings? But we know that God's grace is real because of what it does for us on this sinful planet. If we are empowered to live obedient lives in this sinful environment, then we know that we have been genuinely changed and that grace is real.

Christ said to Nicodemus, "I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above'. . . . Are you a teacher in Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen" (John 3:3-11, NRSV). When we are born from above, "The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself. Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with

Christ, 'I delight to do Thy will, O my God'.⁴⁹ "To arouse those spiritually dead, to create new tastes, new motives, requires as great an outlay of power as to raise one from physical death."⁵⁰

Born to obey. This is the message of Scripture. The new birth frees us from ourselves and sets us free for obedience. It is through free and willing obedience that we become elevated and ennobled.⁵¹ Such obedience is the highest form of worship that man can render to his Maker. The last call to worship is a call to obedience. "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev 14:6, 7, NRSV).

Endnotes

- 1 Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrines*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952), pp. 28-52. "Antinomianism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1924), pp. 57-59. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), pp. 35, 36.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Story of Redemption* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947), pp. 34, 35.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, CA, 1890), p. 49.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 5 *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. I, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953), p. 1084. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 62.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1892), p. 17.
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- 8 White, *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 366.
- 10 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 364.
- 11 Lewis Smedes, *Mere Morality*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), pp. vii, viii.
- 12 Edward Heppenstall, *Salvation Unlimited*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974), p. 211.
- 13 *Time*, "Education," June 22, 1984.
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