

The Posture of the Christian Life – 4 – Obedience

A well-known saying goes like this: Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Show a character, reap a destiny. Thoughts and acts end up shaping eternal destinies.

True Christianity teaches that fundamental to a healthy Christian life is a life of obedience. No fully Christian life can neglect obedience and be considered healthy. James goes out of his way to tell us that a faith without corresponding works is dead.

We have been considering the Christian life – its priorities, process, position and now its posture. The priority of the Christian life is to love God and thereby glorify Him. The process by which this happens is when we live in God's presence by faith and so come to know Him. The only way we can live in His presence is when our position is one of being in Christ and Christ in us. When that is true of us, we can remain in God's presence, as a cycle of communion, conviction, confession, cleansing and conformity to Christ takes place. And for this cycle to be going on, we need to adopt the right posture of life before God. We are to live in the fear of God, responding to both His greatness and goodness. God supremacy leads to the posture of humility. God's holiness and mercy leads to the posture of repentance, and today we consider how God's great and good Lordship leads to the posture of submission.

Once we have repented of sin and are cleansed from it, it is natural to seek to please God and perform His will. The person whose conscience has been cleansed by Christ's sufficiency is eager to respond to the will of God and yield to Him.

Isaiah 6:5-8 *So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged." ⁸ Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."*

The posture of life that Christians need to adopt is one of continual submission and surrender to the will of God. When we considered the process of the Christian life, we said that it is a process of communion, conviction, confession, cleansing and conformity to Christ. The posture of the Christian life corresponds to this ongoing process. Humility is what makes it all possible. Repentance corresponds to conviction, confession and cleansing. Submission, or obedience, corresponds to that fifth stage of the Christian life – conformity to Christ. We are to live with a continual attitude of identifying our sin and forsaking it, and we are to then live in a continual attitude of embracing God's will, and obeying it.

Like with the other postures, we perfect these postures when we compare ourselves to God. We are humble when we see God's supremacy. We are repentant when we see His holiness and mercy. And we are submissive when we see His sovereignty and wisdom.

God deserves our absolute obedience and submission for several reasons:

1) He is the absolute sovereign of the universe, who owns us as Creator.

Isaiah 64:8 ⁸ *But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand.*

By rights, God can demand obedience from us.

2) He is the Lord of believers, who owns us as Redeemer.

Romans 14:9 ⁹ *For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ¹⁹ *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

He is more than the Creator who made us, He has also purchased us. We owe Him obedience on both fronts. But there is a third truth about God that if we keep before us will enable a posture of submission.

3) He is our Father, who owns us as the One who begat us.

Malachi 1:6 ⁶ *"A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'*

Hebrews 12:9 ⁹ *Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*

As Creator, Redeemer, and Father, God is owed our obedience. We are His creatures; His bought possessions, and His children. When we consider that we are living in the presence of our Designer, Purchaser and Begetter, the right response is obedience.

How does God communicate what He wants from us?

In His Word, God reveals His will explicitly:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. .*

In the Bible, God's will for us takes three forms.

1) He gives clear commands and prohibitions. These are unambiguous 'thou shalts' and 'thou shalt nots'.

2) He gives principles in Scripture that must be applied. Here God does not give a clear do or do not, but a timeless idea, which must then be applied in different ways. For example, do not be conformed to the world is more of a principle, which will have all kinds of applications.

3) He gives Scriptural wisdom that can be used for situations that Scripture does not speak of. 1 Corinthians 8-10 shows how Paul applied wisdom to even the matter of eating certain foods.

When we are confronted with God's sovereign will in the Word, the right responsive posture of heart is one of submission and total surrender.

Why is submission to the will of God crucial for a true believer?

1) It is proof of salvation:

1 John 2:3-4 ³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Matthew 7:21 ²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

2) It is a demonstration of love towards God.

John 14:21 ²¹ "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

3) It makes us useful to God.

Romans 12:1-2 **Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

4) It allows us to reflect Him and His character to the world.

Ephesians 2:10 ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Christians who live in God's presence in an attitude of submission and obedience reflect God, produce fruit for God, show their love for God, and reveal that they are truly born again.

Let's get practical. What does surrender and submission look like? What does it really mean during a busy day?

1) We surrender our own authority over our own lives. We yield to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ – we seek to please Him in every situation. In so doing, we choose to love God instead of self.

Luke 6:46 ⁴⁶ "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?

2) We surrender our trust in our own ability to control and run our lives and transfer it to His ability.

Philippians 4:13 ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Obedience can sometimes come from self-induced will power, in which case the Spirit does not empower it and it will not glorify God, or actually defeat sin. However, when obedience comes from faith, God is glorified in it, the Spirit empowers it and we find great joy in it.

Christian obedience is not the same as obedience in many other religions. Obedience for a Christian is not mere moralism. Obedience is not the drudgery of a ritual kept for itself. Obedience, for a Christian is an act of faith, empowered by grace. Christians are not simply keeping a code in their own strength. When Christians obey, they are believing the promises and commands of God, and

relying on Him to enable them to obey these promises and commands.

3) We embrace His will over ours, and seek to live for Him and not for self:

Romans 14:7-9 ⁷ *For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.* ⁸ *For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.* ⁹ *For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*

2 Corinthians 5:9 ⁹ *Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.* ,
2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ¹⁴ *For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;* ¹⁵ *and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*

These acts of surrender and submission correspond to what the Bible calls being 'filled with the Spirit', or 'walking in the Spirit' (Eph 5:18, Gal 5:16-17). Being filled with the Spirit is not receiving more of the Spirit. It is the Spirit receiving more of you, in the form of greater surrender and submission.

So how do we do this? How do we grow this posture of surrender and submission? How do we live in God's presence in a state of being filled with the Spirit?

Being Spirit-filled is often taken to mean something very mystical. However, when we compare Ephesians 5:18-19 to a parallel verse – Colossians 3:16, we see what it really means.

Colossians 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

This verse shows us that being Spirit-filled is very similar to being Word-filled.

The medium through which God gives His will, which we believe and trust by faith, is the Word of God. Faith comes by the Word because the Word reveals what God is for us in Christ. As the Spirit opens up the Word to us, faith springs up. The promises of God are found only in the Word – the content of God's grace is found only in Scripture.

The Spirit of God always uses the Word of God to fellowship with us, teach us and strengthen us. The more the Word dwells richly in us, the more likely we are to surrender to the Spirit, to have Him fill us and fellowship with us. If someone wants to live in God's presence in the posture of submission, he must firstly let the Word of God be in his thought continually, and allow it to shape his thoughts.

Psalms 1:2 ² *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.*

Joshua 1:8 ⁸ *"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

Philippians 4:8 ⁸ *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.*

Once, that is in place, we see a second thing. We must make sure our attitude towards the will of God in the Word of God is one of loving attentiveness; otherwise we will not be submissive.

James 1:19-25 ¹⁹ So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

If the Word is rooted deeply in us, combined with an attitude of loving attentiveness, we must then do everything out of obedient love for Christ.

John 15:1-11, John 14:15 ¹⁵ "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Love is the ultimate motive for Christian obedience. Our submission is in light of His great Sovereign Lordship, but it is energised and motivated by His good and kind character. We see something of this principle illustrated in the self-imposed slavery of the Hebrew slave who had begun to love his master (Exodus 21:1-6). The psalmists speak of their great delight in God's commands.

Psalm 112:1 Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who delights greatly in His commandments.

Psalm 119:16 ¹⁶ I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

4. We must do what we do with reference to Christ and His glory.

Colossians 3:17 ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:23 ²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men

1 Corinthians 10:31 ³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

If we are saturated with the word; attentive in heart; motivated by love; aiming for God's glory - the posture will be one of submission and obedience. The more consistent the obedience, the more like Christ we are becoming. Remember the process of the Christian life – communion with God leads to conviction, which leads to confession, which leads to cleansing, which leads to conformity to Christ. A posture of obedience leads to an increasing likeness to Christ.

Some Scriptures give us extended lists of Christlike character. Some examples are 2 Peter 1:5- 8, Galatians 5:22-23, Romans 12:9-21, Colossians 3:12-17, James 3:17 and the Sermon on the Mount itself. The more we live in a posture of humility, repentance for sin, and submissive obedience, the more the Holy Spirit will produce in us the fruit of Christlike character.

And as we will consider next week, the more like Christ we are, the more we will seek God in loving communion.

As with humility and repentance, the posture of submission also has a horizontal application. To be submissive and surrendered to God's will is also going to show up in our relationships with other people.

1) An attitude of service towards others:

(Philippians 2:3-4) ³ *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.* ⁴ *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ;).*

Mark 9:35 ³⁵ *And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."*

People who have yielded up their own right to God are not clamouring to be served, but are happy to serve others.

2) A heart of mutual submission: willingly placing the needs of others ahead of my own, preferring the will of another when it does not violate God's will.

Ephesians 5:21 ²¹ *submitting to one another in the fear of God.*

1 Peter 5:5 ⁵ *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."*

The posture of the Christian life is one of living in God's presence and responding appropriately. Because He is supreme, we respond with humility. Because He is holy and merciful, we respond with repentance. Because He is a Sovereign Father, we respond with loving, dependent obedience. When these postures come to characterise us, we can live continually in the cycle of communion, conviction, confession, cleansing, conformity to Christ and then more communion. This means we will know God more, and through that, come to love Him more. Next week, we will consider the fourth component of the posture of the Christian life – wholehearted seeking.