

## 23. The Test of Obedience

The New Testament is replete with less than subtle descriptions by which we can know whether we have entered into a genuine life with Christ or whether we have settled into the comfortable and comforting apostate counterfeit men most often call “church.” One such description was given by the apostle John when he wrote:

“And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him.” (1 Jn. 2:3-4)

There is a current tendency to relinquish Christ the King of His personal Lordship over every individual believer. No longer is He a King who gives commands and expects explicit obedience. He is just some kind of super-pal who has ooey-goey sentiments towards us and who would never dream of doing anything that would cause us hardship or trouble or pain. This false “Jesus” (popular at many “churches” – many home-“churches” included) produces only undisciplined and immature pseudo-“Christians” at best and full-blown apostates fallen from the faith at worst. The truth is, however, the King still gives commands and still expects explicit obedience – a fact that the disobedient and apostate will find out when it is far too late to change either their behaviors or their eternal destinies!

Jesus gave one such command when He said,

“A new *commandment* I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn. 13:34-35)

How did Jesus love us? He obediently went to the cross and died there because it was His Father’s will that He should suffer and die so as to become the propitiation (satisfaction, purchase price) against God’s righteous judgment upon fallen and wicked men. Had Jesus subscribed to the notion that God never leads us into suffering and hardship, we would have no means of salvation! Instead, He leaves us with the *command* to obey God, even to the death if necessary, and serve others’ needs as God so directs. He is not commanding us to practice blind, vicarious “charity” nor “random acts of kindness” but rather to perform the good works and actions which He Himself has prepared beforehand for the genuine follower of Christ to routinely and regularly practice. (Eph. 2:10) There are specific actions which are going to be required by God for us to do if we are to be true followers of Christ – actions which will cost us something and may cost us everything we have or which this world offers us. Yet it is this self-sacrificing care for others which lets all men know we truly belong to Christ. If this love is absent from our lives, we are practicing disobedience to the King of light and will one day reap the consequences.

James recognized the necessity of caring for one another and used it as a foundational example to instruct his readers about the nature of faith.

“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (Jas. 2:15-16)

Love must be more than words and it must meet real needs or else our “love” is merely self-serving philanthropy that bears no eternal fruit for Christ’s kingdom.

John also recognized the deep nature of genuine godly agape love. He wrote:

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth...” (1 Jn. 3:16-19)

If we have something some other follower of Christ truly needs and we don’t share it with them, it is only evidence that we are not genuinely and truthfully following Christ but have instead bought into some deceptive counterfeit.

Another *command* given by the King is found in the preaching of Paul.

“Truly, these times of ignorance [idolatry] God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30)

Repentance is the act of turning away from sinful and selfish actions and attitudes and turning toward obedience to the things which God says are right and true. Mere words are inadequate – we must actively obey God in spirit and in truth. (Jn. 4:24, Lk. 6:46)

John the Baptist came in advance of the King, *commanding* all who would hear to repent and make straight the path the King would take to enter into their hearts. (Lk. 3:4) His message included the warning to “bear fruits worthy of repentance.” (Lk. 3:8) The chief fruit of living by the Spirit is love. (Gal. 5:22) Peter places love as last in the list of the steps to attaining to spiritual maturity (2 Pet. 1:5-7) and Jesus warned that “because lawlessness [doing what is right in one’s own eyes] will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” (Mt. 24:12)

The “church” is busily separating people who claim to follow Christ into opposing camps based on differing “theologies” and practices which appeal to varying individual tastes. Atop this inherent divisiveness, the “church” often teaches the false, tolerant “Jesus” – a demonic teaching which brings no (nor often even allows for) discipline or suffering whereby the “church” attendees might begin to spiritually mature. As a result, love – the genuine badge of truly belonging to Christ – is virtually non-existent in “church” circles. This is as true of those who have abandoned the “church” institution that “meets” within the walls of the “church” building as it is of those who have stopped “meeting” in specialized buildings and have opted for home meetings but have nonetheless retained the superficiality and Nicolaitan authority structure of the institutional “church.” As Loisy so astutely observed, “Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom of God but it was the Church that came.”

Leaving the false “church” behind is not enough – one *must* move on into obedience to Christ and God, the kingdom of God. Getting out of the “church” is easy enough – getting “church” out of our hearts, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors is the really hard task. If we would but obey the *commands* to love one another and to genuinely repent, most of the flesh-stained garments we wear and even flaunt would become abominable even to ourselves.

There is one more facet of obedience that needs to be understood. The kingdom of God only

comes among men when He is obeyed, when His will is followed. (Mt. 6:10) We simply cannot initiate or invent (or re-invent) or install (or re-install) the kingdom of God. We can only obey God and His kingdom will have come into our midst. Any disobedience on our part – even corrupted obedience like what is practiced at “church” – will dilute our experience, perhaps even our inheritance, of the kingdom of God. The kingdom now and dominion-ist people have already tried to install the kingdom and failed miserably. Why should we think ours is a better plan? Only obeying and following God will produce His kingdom in our midst.

Any practice that is not properly supported by a detailed, thorough and complete message from the New Testament, God’s true “manifesto,” will easily devolve into error and abomination. That message may be only a confirmation or clarification of the message and practice of the kingdom and it may be basically all that the Lord gives an individual and his own family. But just because such a person does not have followers or sycophants does not disqualify such a one from kingdom life or leadership – that is a leftover “church”-ism. If one is surrounded locally only by mere “church”-ites, it is not even possible to participate in a local demonstration of the kingdom apart from one’s own family! In fact, if a family loyally demonstrates the kingship of Christ in spite of the “church”-ites and “church”-isms that surround them, that may be a more valid testimony of the power of the kingdom at work in that person’s life than whether they produce a community or even nation that follows kingdom principles. Conversely, if the vision or understanding that is driving a particular practice comes primarily (or worse, only!) from one person and then other people are goaded or even just guided into buying into that vision, it is merely a pattern and not necessarily the leading and guiding of the Lord.

Jeremiah prophesied, “Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,” says the LORD, “who steal My words every one from his neighbor.” (Jer. 23:30) We simply cannot take someone else’s vision for the way the body should be – *ekklesia*, home fellowship, kingdom house, reformation, whatever – and attain to the will of God for our own lives. We must seek God’s vision for our own life and live that and be content. If we take on someone else’s large scale visions and insights, we will have, at best, a pattern – at the worst, we will have stolen the word of the Lord from our neighbor and not gotten our own unique set of instructions and inspiration from the mouth of God for ourselves. Even when our instructions are very similar to instructions already given to another, but especially when our instructions would differ from what God has said to another, we have subtly opted to follow men rather than God.

If we preach our vision of *ekklesia* or of the kingdom of God and we fail to remind our hearers to seek God’s unique variation or even contradiction of that particular theme for their own lives, we are simply and only presenting our brothers and neighbors with the opportunity to steal the word of the Lord from us. If we need anyone from any group of “leaders” in order to know or understand what God is saying, someone has diluted and contaminated the message of the kingdom of God. We must be taught to hear and obey only God for ourselves in *all* things or we will only be yet another participant in some form of abomination or apostasy.

Let he who has ears hear.

Chapter 22: The Two Step Gospel

<http://paidionbooks.org/girard/tgotk/22tsg.pdf>

Chapter 24: Who Is My Neighbor?

<http://paidionbooks.org/girard/tgotk/24wimn.pdf>