

4. Learning to Practice Obedience to God

In our last topic, we concluded by saying that God gives us the opportunity to make choices. As Christians, the Lord also gives us the power to carry out those choices as we yield to the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment. If we make good choices, we reap good consequences. If we make sinful choices, we reap bad consequences. We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to help others learn to make wise choices so they can reap the blessings of the Lord. Today, we will learn how to equip our children to make wise choices.

James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” Here, we see that we are given a choice. We can be just a hearer of the Word of God, or we can choose to be a doer of the Word of God. This verse tells us the consequences if we choose to be just a hearer of the Word of God. We are actually making the choice to deceive ourselves. Matthew 7:24-27 says, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” We see that we can choose to hear but not obey the Word of God. If we make that choice, God says we will be foolish and deceive ourselves. In contrast, we see that we will be wise if we choose to hear, and obey, the Word of God.

James goes on to give an illustration of how people deceive themselves if they make the choice to hear the Word of God but not obey it. James 1:23-24 says, “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; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” Here, we see the process a foolish person goes through when they make the choice to hear, but not obey, the Word of God. Such a person does three things: he observes himself; he goes on his way; he immediately forgets what he has seen.

The word that is translated “observes” means *to fix a person’s eyes or mind on something*. It is used in Hebrews 10:24-25, where we read, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Here, we see that we are to fix our eyes and thoughts on the needs of other Christians. If we observe and obey, we will have a good consequence, because we will stimulate love and good works in other Christians by getting together with them and encouraging them. In contrast, if we carefully observe other Christians and do not encourage them, we will not stir up love and good works and so there will be no benefit even though we observed an opportunity to do good.

The second thing a person does when he deceives himself is to go his way. Christ talked about two men who deceived themselves and went on their way in the parable of the Good Samaritan, in Luke 10:25-37. Luke 10:31-32 says, “Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the

place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.” Both of these men missed the opportunity to do good, because they saw an opportunity and went on their way.

The third thing a person does when he deceives himself is to immediately forget what he has seen. The disciples did this in John 4. They went into the Samaritan city of Sychar and saw the people. But, when they came back to Christ, they had already forgotten what they had seen. As a result, Christ told the disciples, in John 4:35, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” A short time later, the Samaritan woman went into the same city, saw the same people, and took action. John 4:39 says, “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I *ever* did.’” This woman, and many others, received eternal life because of the choice she made.

James 1:25 talks about the wise man that makes wise choices and receives great blessings because of those choices. That verse says, “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.” The perfect law of liberty is explained in Galatians 5:13, where we read, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that we carry out the law of liberty when we serve one another in love. We see that we are to continue in the law of liberty, which means that if we practice true obedience, we continually look for opportunities to serve one another in love and then take those opportunities to serve one another in love.

Here, we see that the Christian who chooses to obey the law of liberty does so by choosing not to be a forgetful hearer. Instead, this is a person who chooses to do what God says to do. The reward that God promises, to the person who is obedient to His Word, is blessing in the things that the person does. Psalm 1:1-3 says, “Blessed *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” Here, we see that one of the things we want to help our children experience is the blessing of the Lord because they have chosen to be obedient to His Word.

James 1:26-27 gives us three different examples of the way we practice obedience to the Lord. First, we practice obedience by our personal worship. James 1:26 says, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* useless.” The word that is translated “religious” here speaks of *a person who fears or worships God*. Here, we see again the danger of self-deception. This verse says that the person who does not bridle his tongue has deceived his own heart. This is true because of the fact that our words describe what is in our heart.

This verse says that the worship of a person who is not learning to bridle his tongue is useless. Christ quoted from Isaiah, when He said, in Matthew 15:7-9, “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with

their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.” Here, we see that false worship is teaching the doctrines of people. True worship must come from the heart.

In contrast, Matthew 12:35 says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.” The first part of the verse shows what is required for obedience as we worship the Lord with our words. John 4:23-24 says, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” According to these verses written in New Testament times, true worship only happens as we yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit. This true worship is focused on teaching the Word of God instead of the doctrines of men. We need to help our children understand that God is seeking people who will worship Him by yielding their spirit to Him, obeying His Word in their own lives, and then sharing the Word of God with others.

James 1:27 tells us two other ways we practice obedience to the Lord in our worship. That verse says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” Second, we see that we practice obedience in our worship by our service. Orphans are children whose parents have died, and widows are women whose husbands have died. The word that is translated “visit” means *to look after in order to care and help out with their needs*. In most cultures, these are the poorest of the poor, because they have no one to care for them. Paul concluded his final words to the leaders of the church at Ephesus, by saying, in Acts 20:35, “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”” We see that true obedience and worship involves ministering to the needs of the poor and the needy.

Third, we see that we practice obedience in our worship by living a holy life. Ephesians 1:3-4 says, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” Then, 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” We want to show our physical and spiritual children, by our example, how to live holy lives.

It is a great privilege to show both our physical and our spiritual children how to grow and become more like Christ as they learn to practice obedience to the Lord in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children, by your example, how to practice a life of obedience to the Lord.