



Type: Book Chapter

Obedience

Author(s): Joseph F. Smith

Source: *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*

Published: Salt Lake City; The Deseret News, 1919

Pages: 263-272

Abstract: Obedience an Eternal Principle—How to Rise Above the Weakness of Mortality
—Obedience to Church Ordinances Indispensable—Obedience Brings Light and Freedom
—Blessings from Obedience

CHAPTER XI.

Obedience

OBEDIENCE AN ETERNAL PRINCIPLE. We have entered into the bond of that new and everlasting covenant agreeing that we would obey the commandments of God in all things whatsoever he shall command us. This is an everlasting covenant even unto the end of our days. And when is the end of our days? We may think it has reference to the end of our mortal life; that a time will come after we have finished this probation when we can live without obedience to the commandments of God. This is a great error. We shall never see the day in time nor in eternity, when it will not be obligatory and when it will not be a pleasure as well as a duty for us, as his children, to obey all the commandments of the Lord throughout the endless ages of eternity. It is upon this principle that we keep in touch with God, and remain in harmony with his purposes. It is only in this way that we can consummate our mission, and obtain our crown and the gift of eternal lives, which is the greatest gift of God. Can you imagine any other way?

God has established all things in their order. The house of God is a house of order, and not a house of confusion. In this house God himself is the Supreme Head, and he must be obeyed. Christ is in the image and likeness of his being, his Only Begotten Son, and he stands as our Savior and our God. We must walk in his paths, and observe his precepts to do them, or we will be cut off. Next unto God and Christ, on the earth is placed one unto whom the keys of power and the authority of the holy priesthood are conferred, and unto whom the right of presidency is given. He is God's mouthpiece to His people, in all things pertaining to the building up of Zion and to the spiritual and

temporal salvation of the people. He is as God's vicegerent; I do not hesitate to announce this truth; for it is his word, and therefore it is true. The people who have entered into covenant to keep the commandments of the Lord must hearken unto the voice of him who is placed to preside over them; and, secondarily, to those who are called to act with him as his counselors in the holy priesthood. It takes this council of three to constitute the presiding and governing authority of the priesthood in the earth. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, constitute the Godhead and the matchless governing quorum over all the creations of the Father. Three men stand at the head of the Church on the earth. Yet there are those who call themselves Saints who hesitate not to rise up in condemnation of, and to express words of hatred and malice toward these men who stand at the head of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.—*Apr. C. R.*, 1898, pp. 68-69.

HOW TO RISE ABOVE THE WEAKNESS OF MORTALITY. I would like all the Latter-day Saints to feel in their hearts that the work in which they are engaged is not only the work that God has instituted in the latter days, but that it is a work in which each individual member of the Church is deeply and vitally interested. Every man and every woman should feel a deep and abiding interest in the work of the Lord, in the growth and development of the great latter-day cause, which cause is intended for the redemption of all men from the powers of sin, from all its contaminating effects, for the redemption of man from his own weakness and ignorance, and from the grasp that Satan holds upon the world, that men may be made free; for no man is or can be made free without possessing a knowledge of the truth and obeying the same. It is only the possession and observance of the truth that can make men free, and all those who do not possess and obey it are slaves and not free men.

It is only by obedience to the laws of God, that men can rise above the petty weaknesses of mortality and exercise that breadth of affection, that charity of love, that should actuate the hearts and the motives of the children of men. The gospel as it has been restored is intended to make free indeed, free to choose the good and to forsake the evil, free to exercise that boldness in their choice of that which is good, by which they are convinced of right, notwithstanding the great majority of the people of the world may point at them the finger of scorn and ridicule. It requires no especial bravery on the part of men to swim with the currents of the world. When a man makes up his mind to forsake the world and its follies and sins, and identify himself with God's people, who are everywhere spoken evil of, it takes courage, manhood, independence of character, superior intelligence, and a determination that is not common among men; for men shrink from that which is unpopular, from that which will not bring them praise and adulation, from that which will in any degree tarnish that which they call honor or a good name.—*Oct. C. R.*, 1903, pp. 1, 2.

OBEDIENCE TO CHURCH ORDINANCES INDISPENSABLE. From remarks that sometimes fall from members of the Church, one is led to believe that they regard the gospel of Jesus Christ simply from the standpoint of a code of morals; that if one lives an honest, upright life, that is all that the gospel requires of him; that it is not necessary to observe the rites, ceremonies and ordinances of the Church; that the latter constitute a sort of religious trapping that has no substantial value in the plan of life and salvation. Such a position does not harmonize with the word of God given to this people, nor with the teachings of Christ in his day, nor is it in harmony with the universal instinct of man to worship God.

Jesus himself attended to the ordinance of baptism; he instituted the sacrament of the Lord's supper and ordained

its observance; and performed other rites which he thought essential to man's salvation. In the case of Nicodemus, he so emphasized baptism that he made the birth of water and the Spirit essential to man's salvation.

Besides the rites and ceremonies and the moral effect they and other means of worshiping God have upon the moral life of man, the gospel is also a power in itself. It is a creative power which gives man not alone dominion in the world, but the power, if he can attain it by his faith, to ordain and create other worlds. On one occasion Jesus commended to the disciples the value of faith as a power when he told them that if they had faith as a grain of mustard, they could say unto the mountain, be thou removed, and it should be done. It is true that our faith would be greatly weakened by acts of immorality, and it might be wholly destroyed by such acts; but faith and morality are not convertible terms. A moral life is one of the means by which we cultivate faith, but it is not the only means. We may not see any moral virtue in the ordinance of baptism, in the laying on of hands, or in any other rite or ceremony of the Church, but our obedience to these rites and ordinances may be quite as helpful in developing our faith as any act of charity we may perform. Faith is always a gift of God to man, which is obtained by obedience, as all other blessings are.

The man or woman in this Church who desires to enrich his or her faith to the highest possible degree will desire to observe every rite and ordinance in the Church in conformity to the law of obedience to the will of God. In these things and through them, man gains a more perfect knowledge of God's purposes in the world. An enriched faith means an enlarged power, and though man may not have in this life an occasion to exercise all the powers that come to him through the enrichment of his faith, those powers may be exercised in their fulness in eternity, if not in time. The

man or woman, therefore, among the Latter-day Saints, who does not see the necessity for the ordinances of the House of God, who does not respond to the requirements of the gospel in all its rites and ordinances, can have no proper conception of the great work which the Latter-day Saints have been called upon to perform in this age, nor can he or she enjoy the blessing that comes from the virtue of obedience to a law higher than that of man.—*Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 38, November 1, 1903, p. 656.

OBEDIENCE BRINGS LIGHT AND FREEDOM. The gospel is very simple when we understand it properly. It is plain and easily understood. It is always right, good, uplifting, comforting and enlightening. It prompts men and women to do that which is acceptable before God, who is just, righteous, allwise, allgood, and allmerciful.

The gospel teaches us to forgive, to overcome selfishness, covetousness; to abjure anger, wrath, faultfinding, complaining and the spirit of contention and strife. The gospel warns and forewarns the children of men against the evils which bring disunion and contention and shut out honesty and love from among the children of men; which mislead people to acts of injustice, selfishness, covetousness, wickedness and sin, things which the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us to eschew and avoid as we would the gates of hell. There is nothing intricate or incomprehensible in the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who possess the Spirit of the Lord.

There is nothing mysterious and unaccountable in the dealings of God with his children, if we can only see and understand by the spirit of truth. Jesus has given us in this life the example, the type of that which exists in greater perfection, in a purer, higher and more glorious excellence where he dwells himself. The gospel teaches us to do here just what we would be required to do in the heavens, with God and the angels, if we would listen to its teachings, and

obey it, and put it into practice. There would be no covetousness in the hearts of the children of men, if they possessed the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and understood the precepts of the gospel as he taught and admonished all men to observe them.

There would be no strife, no anger, nothing of the spirit of unforgiveness, unchastity and injustice, in the hearts of the children of men, if we loved the truth and obeyed it as it was taught by the Son of Man. With this spirit we could advance to the extreme position that we would pray for those who despitefully use us, who speak all manner of evil against us falsely, accuse us of wrong doing, and lay plans and plots to bring us into disrepute. There would be no such desires in the hearts of the children of men, if they possessed the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. There would be no contention, dishonor, nor dishonesty among neighbors nor in the communities of the people. None would take advantage of the unwary, the weak or unsuspecting; no one would seek to wrong another; but, on the contrary, we would feel like Jesus himself expressed it, "he that is greatest among you, let him be the servant of all." If we would be great among the children of men let us show that we are willing to serve and to do good to our fellowmen, set them a right example, shield them from wrong, show them the right way, help them to avoid error and sin, and to walk in the light, as God is in the light, that they may have fellowship with him and with one another, and that the blood of Christ may indeed cleanse them from all sin.

The spirit of the gospel should teach us that if men sue us at the law, and take away our coat wrongfully and wickedly, intending to injure or degrade us, that we would rise above the spirit of contention and retribution in our own souls, and speak as Jesus spoke: "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

My brethren and sisters, if we would build up ourselves,

or ever become worthy to inherit the kingdom of God, we will do so on the principle of eternal truth. The truth is what will make us free; free from error, prejudice, selfishness, ignorance, contention, the power of the adversary of our souls, free from the power of death and hell; free to inherit the fulness of the everlasting gospel; free to have joy in our hearts for all things good and for the welfare of mankind; free to forgive those who err because of lack of judgment and understanding. But the Spirit of truth, mark you, will not tolerate and will not forgive determined, premeditated and deliberate wrong in man or woman, in the world—truth will not tolerate it. We can not forgive that kind or class of crime and wickedness. We can not, or if we do, we transgress the laws of God, for he has no sympathy with Satan, nor with him who knoweth to do good and doeth evil; who knoweth to do right but is determined to do wrong. There is no forgiveness to such without humble and most contrite repentance of sin. When one gets far enough along in the crime of wickedness and disobedience to the principles of the gospel, and in the abandonment of love for his fellowmen and for the Church of Jesus Christ, so that he will fight and lie about the Church and the truth, and seek by every power within his reach to injure and wrong them, there is no forgiveness for that man, and if he goes just far enough, there is no repentance for him either.

And how do you pray? To be heard because of many words? No; but because the Lord has said it is your duty to inquire of him; I will be inquired of, by my people; I will be asked for blessings, for my gifts, and the door will be opened to them that knock and those who seek after the truth shall find it.

Fathers, pray with your families; bow down with them morning and at night; pray to the Lord, thank him for his goodness, mercy and Fatherly kindness, just as our earthly

fathers and mothers have been extremely kind to us poor, disobedient and wayward children.

Do you pray? What do you pray for? You pray that God may recognize you, that he may hear your prayers, and that he may bless you with his Spirit, and that he may lead you into all truth and show you the right way; that he will warn you against wrong and guide you into the right path; that you may not fall astray, that you may not veer into the wrong way unto death, but that you may keep in the narrow way. You pray for your wives to have health and strength, blessed to be happy and contented, true to their children, true to their homes, true to you. The wives pray that they may also have power to overcome the weaknesses of fallen human nature, and rise to teach their children the beauty and glory of a righteous life, and that the children may be blest to carry out in their lives the wish and desire of their parents; that they may perfect their lives here by living up to the wise teachings of the gospel. So we pray for what we need.

While in my boyhood days, when I was like some of these little boys, I used to wonder—how could the Lord hear me when I was in secret, or wherever I might be? I wondered at it? Do you wonder at it now, when you have learned something of the late discoveries made by human wisdom and human intelligence?

They have discovered that there is a principle by which communication between distant points, thousands of miles away, may take place, and one man may communicate with another through the air, his words and voice being distinctly and clearly heard. If in the midst of the Pacific ocean, a thousand or more miles from shore, I could send a message inland a thousand or more miles and could send it without the medium of wire, merely by the power or force of electricity, to my home thousands of miles away, how easy, is it not, for God to hear our prayers, who understands, and knows all things, long before we ever thought of such won-

derful inventions, and who has power over all things!

Is it any wonder that the Lord can hear you when you whisper, even in your secret closet! Is there any doubt in your minds about it? If man can communicate across the continent by means of a telephone without wires—by means of human invention, by reason of the wisdom of man, is there any one who doubts the ability of God to hear the earnest, honest supplication of the soul? Do not doubt any more that the Lord can hear your prayers, when with a small instrument, sensitive to the electric spark, you can distinctly hear the human voice in your home received from the ocean thousands of miles away. When you can communicate to some one in the midst of the ocean from your home, far inland from the ocean—do not for a moment doubt that the Lord understands all these means of communication and that he has means of hearing and understanding your innermost secret thoughts. “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.” It does not take many words to ask the Lord for what we need; but we must ask in faith, confidence and trust. It will not do to have doubts in our minds when we call upon the Lord for a blessing. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.” (James 1:5-7.)

When a little child bows down in its perfect simplicity and asks the Father for a blessing, the Father hears the voice, and will answer in blessings upon his head, because the child is innocent and asks in full trust and confidence.

These are simple principles that I have sought to impress upon your minds. They are simple, but necessary, and essential. There is no mystery about them, there is no mystery in the birth of man into the world when you under-

stand the laws of nature, which are the laws of God—no mystery about it. There will be no more mystery in the resurrection from the dead to life and everlasting light, than there is in the birth of man into the world, when we understand the truth, as we will some day, as the Lord of glory instituted it. There is no mystery in the birth or begetting of the Son of God, nor regarding his birth into the world. It was just as natural and as strictly in accordance with the laws of nature and of God, as the birth of any one of his children, the birth of any one of us. It was simply in accordance with truth, and law and order. Will the men of the world receive the gospel? Will they hearken to the truth? Or will they mystify the truth and seek to becloud the children of men over simple truths when they should understand them? From the middle-aged to the gray-haired man, as well as the youth, all should understand the principles of the gospel, the simple truths given for the redemption and exaltation of man.—*Granite Stake Conference*, Sunday, Nov. 25, 1917.

BLESSINGS FROM OBEDIENCE. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of Light, who is no respecter of persons and in whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. To please him we must not only worship him with thanksgiving and praise, but render willing obedience to his commandments. By so doing he is bound to bestow his blessings; for it is upon this principle (obedience to law) that all blessings are predicated.—*Improvement Era*, Vol. 21, December, 1917.