

"In the beginning  
was the Word,  
and the Word was  
with God, and the  
Word was God."  
—John 1:1

The Lord's Flock  
**Growth**  
DIGEST  
PASTORAL GROWTH SERIES



## “GOD TESTS OUR FAITH THROUGH OBEDIENCE”

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Another way that God tests our faith is by obedience. How obedient are you? In the Lord's Flock, obedience is doing exactly what God wants, how he says it and when he says it, until it is done.

Obedience is one of the descriptions of Jesus in many passages in the Bible. It is written, in Philippians 2, that our Lord Jesus is obedient and modest. He humbled himself, became man, obeyed, and submitted to the will of His Father until He died on the cross.

What are the characteristics of an obedient man? In Philippians 2:5-13, St. Paul said, *“In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”*

As the letter of St. Paul continues, you can see the reactions of people who find it hard to obey. In verses 14-15 of the same chapter, it is written, *“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.”*

So, it is very clear that one of the most admirable traits of Jesus is obedience. The passages above showed us how He forgot who He was and obeyed his Father. You may be wondering why He forgot about Himself. It is because we can never obey if we only thought about ourselves. We can never obey if we think highly of ourselves and believe that we are better off than others. If we say “I’m somebody. I’m intelligent. I’m popular.” then we will find it hard to obey God. Remember that Jesus set aside the fact that He is God and He chose to obey.

Is it easy for you to forget and set aside what you want in order to obey? It is not easy but we must follow Jesus’ example for He emptied himself and did not regard Himself equal to God when He was here on earth. If He wanted to, He could have proven to everyone that He was God’s Son but instead He chose to empty Himself. It is only when we empty ourselves, when we are empty vessels, that we can be filled by the Holy Spirit, just as the Lord said in Eph. 5:18, *“... be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that we are vessels. If the vessel is full of pride, greed, selfish ambition, self-centeredness, self-righteousness, and hunger for power, then the Lord can not fill the vessel for the Lord only chooses to fill empty vessels. That is why it is important to forget about ourselves and remove all hindrances that would stop us from being filled by the Holy Spirit.

Going back to St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, it says that Jesus emptied Himself and took the form of a slave. As we all know, slaves have no right to answer back, complain, disobey or argue with his/her master. This was not easy, for it is hard not to complain about anything that we are asked to do. Jesus came in human likeness. He was born of the Virgin Mary and was a man. Only when He was glorified as the son of God, when He resurrected and ascended, that He came back to the likeness of God as it was written in

John 7:39, *"For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus wasn't yet glorified."* So, nobody can say that, "Jesus is Lord so it must have been a piece of cake for Him not to complain and obey the Lord."

Jesus emptied Himself and obeyed the Father until His death. Jesus' life is a very beautiful example of obedience and because of this, God greatly exalted him. So, have the same attitude of Christ and be like Him.

Paul told the Philippians that the more that he was not there, the more that they should still obey and do what they had been doing. It is a life of obedience.

Jesus chose to obey when He decided to stay and talk with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. Also, When He was offered food by the apostles, He answered them, in John 4:34, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work."*

Faithfulness is another characteristic of Jesus, for He obeyed His Father until death and in the end He was able to say that the work was done.

The dictionary defines obedience as act of obeying; the action or condition of obeying authority, Christianity's church rule, religious authority of a priest or other member/s of the clergy.

We have society breakdown because of disobedience. There is a growing lack of respect for authority which will lead us to the road of chaos. Nowadays, many people are disobedient and stubborn. People tend to disobey even rules as simple as using the pedestrian lane when crossing the street.

So, let us be like Jesus- obedient to death and faithful in finishing God's work.

There are many people who prefer to do what is right in their own eyes and do things that are for their own good without looking at the big picture. The solution is to make a simple choice i.e. to obey. Let us focus on the word 'choice.' There is no such thing as blind obedience. We always have our free will for God never took it away from us. Therefore, we are always free to make our choices. Also, God gave us intellect in order to distinguish right from wrong. But, because of this choice, many choose to disobey. Why? Because it is hard to obey. Why is it hard to obey? Because you have to forget what you want and to humble yourself. It is hard to humble ourselves because by nature we love to be on the spotlight.

We must always be aware of the devices of Satan as it is written in 2 Cor. 2:11, *"...that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes."* Why? Because he is going to tempt you to be proud. He knows that one of the characters of our Lord is humility and the Lord does not like the proud. The Lord always wants our obedience and we can not obey when we are proud and not teachable. In James 4:6, God said, *"...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

We can choose to obey or we can choose to disobey. Our choice comes with consequences which has always been the case throughout history. When we obey, we must leave the result to God for there are times that we may not be able to understand what God wants for us. We know what we want to do, but there are times that what we want is not what God wants. For instance, sometimes the Lord tells you to wait, for He plans to do something great for you but you do not want to wait.

In Matthew 3:13-17, the Lord said, *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan[a] to John, to be baptized by him. But John would have hindered him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?'"* But Jesus, answering, said to him, *"Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness."* Then he allowed him. Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

It pleases God whenever we imitate His Son's obedience. Do you know what delights God? He is delighted when He sees us obey. Obedience is very important to Him because that was the first thing that He asked our first parents to do. It was also the first disobedience of our first parents and that led to the closing of the door of heaven for us. Thank God for sending His Son, Jesus the second Adam in 1 Cor. 15, for through Him we were all given the right to come back to God.

That is why the Lord told the apostles to teach about obedience. That is why He said, in John 14:15-17, *"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him*

*nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*

God the Father and the Son knew that even though the Father sent His only Son to redeem us, we still need a third persona, the Holy Spirit, to help us. In Ezek. 36:26, *"I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."* So, what comes after a change of heart? It is the obedience of a person. This is why the Son asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit. The Lord wants to help us become better people and wants us to learn how to obey.

St. Paul is a good example of this. When he was not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, he had a heart that was so murderous that he punished and killed a lot of Christians. But then, he, himself, said in Romans 7:18, *"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."* So, why is it so hard for us to obey? It is because the sin of disobedience dwelling in us.

The Devil, according to John 8:44, is a liar, deceiver and has been a murderer since the beginning. It is written in John 8:44, *"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."* So, if we carry out the Devil's desires, we are not children of God but children of the Devil. This is why we need to be very careful. God assigned angels to guide and guard us, but Satan also assigned tempters to cause us to sin. But, we must not blame Satan when we sin because he can tempt us all, but in the end it is up to us to decide because we have our free will.

The moment that you chose to disobey, you invite more demonic spirits that you can not imagine. If you will study demonology, there are 52 demonic spirits that are called generals. It means, like in the military ranks, each of the 52 generals has its own soldiers and these are the demons. Once we start listening to him, we provide an opening for him. And when he enters the room we opened for him, he will destroy us. That is the consequence of disobedience. This is why we need to obey.

When we obey God, it is not blind obedience. It is written, in 2 Cor. 4, *"in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them."* So how can you say that obedience is blindness? It is written in the passage that the one who blinds us is Satan not God. The Lord is light and He always enlightens.

In Matt. 3:13-17, God gave us a powerful example of choosing obedience and there are four things that we are going to discuss.

### **1. Seek to see the big picture first.**

Let us go back to Matthew 3:13-14, Jesus told John the Baptist that He, the Son of God, needed to be baptised by him. The scene must have been classic. Matthew gave us a glimpse of how John protested strenuously to such a degree that he was hesitant to baptize Jesus. It should had been the other way, Jesus baptizing him. However, John did not see the big picture. Obviously, John was born ahead of Jesus and he was the herald that will proclaim: *"Behold this is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, that I am not even worthy to untie the strings of his sandals."*

The church is like a wrist watch. It has many different parts and each part plays a very important role and is needed for it to function. Each of us has different gifts and talents, and we are all equally important members of the church. We may not be in the leading role but it is acceptable. We are all important.

God calls us to focus on the gifts and talents that we have and what we are doing with them. Often times, at the exclusion of other gifts and talents, we overlook the big picture and we do not see the bigger function. We forget that it is only through all of us working together that we can produce extraordinarily and outstanding results.

When we are challenged in our thoughts and actions, we, not unlike John, like to prevent the kingdom building from taking place through disobeying. We need to obey. We need to ask ourselves what is it that we have been strenuously protesting here in community and why. So, get the big picture perspective and see how your protests fit in.

**2. Obedience may not always be popular.**

In Matthew 3:15, it is written, "*Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.*" We must perform completely whatever is right.

We must always remember that sometimes when we obey we become unpopular. Why? It is because not all people would like to obey and some people will not understand your obedience. Jesus said; permit it, for it is just now. You need to use your common sense.

**3. Allow obedience to open your spiritual eyes.**

We must obey because we love God and we want to glorify him. When we obey, God will say to us, "My beloved, in whom I delight."

Remember the test of demand. When he demands something, he will equip, support and provide us whatever we need.

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