

Obeying

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[0:00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. Our heart is always the same. We want to get into the Word of God, but most of all, we want that Word to get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of Christ.

Now, in the early frontier days, there was a settlement out west whose citizens were mostly in the lumber business. And as the primitive little town began to grow in number, expand in size, they decided they needed a church.

So they built a nice log building with room to grow. They even called their first pastor. He moved into the area to begin his ministry and right away, the people really liked him.

He loved and shepherded them well. He also had a joy about him that they admired, and he was a really good preacher. Then a year or so into his ministry, he just so happened to see some church people dragging logs up the banks that had been floated from upriver.

[1:14] Well, that wasn't real unusual, but what they did next was. See, in those days, the owner would take a stamp or a brand, and they would brand the ends of those logs to show who they belonged to.

And this preacher watched as his faithful church members pulled them up and cut off the ends. They obviously were stealing someone else's logs and getting rid of the evidence.

So on that Sunday, a little passive-aggressive, but he decided to preach the commandment, Thou shall not steal. And at the end of the service, even those who were guilty shook his hand and told him that it was a great message.

One of them even said, Mighty fine preaching today, Pastor. Not exactly the response that he expected. And so he went home to prepare his next message on the same commandment.

This time, at the end of his message, he said, Yes, thou shall not steal, but thou shall also not cut off the end of thy neighbor's logs.

[2:17] And boy, was the response a lot different this time as he applied the passage that exposed their disobedience. And guess what? They ran him out of town.

Now, let me show you a good example on the other side. When the famous missionary, Adoniram Judson, graduated from seminary, he received a call to be an assistant pastor at this very well-known, large, well-to-do church in Boston.

Now, this was quite a compliment. It showed the potential that they saw in him. This also made his mom and sister just absolutely thrilled that he could stay at home and still follow his call into ministry.

However, when most would have jumped at this opportunity, he declined. And he said, My work is not here. God is calling me beyond the seas to stay here even to serve God in his ministry.

I feel would be only partial obedience, and I could not be happy in that. And while it was a sacrifice to leave his family behind, enduring many hardships to spread the gospel, did you know that the churches he started in Burma have yielded around 50,000 followers of Christ?

[3:35] And we can't even measure his complete impact that he made as he inspired many generations to follow God's call onto the mission field.

Now, today, we hit the halfway point in this series called Secret. And if you want to go ahead and grab your Bibles, turn with me probably about three-quarters-ish way through your Bible to John 15, John chapter 15.

And we're going to look at the secret to living for Jesus. And just like that sermon bumper that we show each Sunday, as it shows, we have been zooming in a little more each week.

If the first week was the big picture that represented kind of the map of the United States, we learned the secret to living for Jesus is bearing fruit.

And if last week signified kind of the zoom in to the Indiana level, we learned that the secret to fruit bearing is abiding in your relationship with Christ.

[4:38] And then today, we're going to kind of bring the focus all the way down to the Greensburg level as we discover the secret to abiding is obeying. And I like what a couple of the big-time theologians shared on this topic.

Matthew Henry, I mean, this is over 300 years ago. He said, when we are calling God to turn the eye of his favor toward us, he is calling us to turn the eye of our obedience toward him.

And then even further back than that, in the 16th century, John Calvin said, we cannot rely on God's promises without obeying his commandments.

Now listen, I hope that we can take time to study God's word, to wrestle through our beliefs on all sorts of matters in this world. I pray we even make it a priority to memorize hundreds of passages that can easily be recalled to our minds when Satan comes with his lies.

I hope you're here every Sunday minus sickness and vacation. I hope each of us get the opportunity to someday, if you've not already, go to the Holy Lands and walk where Jesus walked as our Bible comes to life even more.

[5:49] I hope that we'll be a church full of prayer warriors. I pray that we won't be a bunch of pew potatoes, but instead that we'll serve in our giftedness. And while it's a big yes to all of those things, listen, they mean nothing if I'm not obedient to Christ.

If I'm not obeying the Holy Spirit's leading that always lines up with the Bible. And I wonder today where your mind goes when you think of the word obey.

Now if you're a kid, it might be obeying the teacher's command to do your homework, or the constant reminders from your parents to always do the right thing. Don't hit your brother, don't hit your sister.

And if you're the parent, it may be the annoyance of having to always remind your kids to obey. At work, it may mean dropping my pride, submitting to the boss's orders, as long as it doesn't disturb my integrity.

In a marriage, it may be loving your spouse the way God calls you to, regardless of their behavior. It may be obeying authority that God has allowed over you when it doesn't compromise your faith.

[6:58] And when it comes to your relationship with Christ, when it comes to us, the branches, abiding in Jesus, the vine, it takes obedience to his word, his will, and his ways.

See, as we look at John 15, Jesus gives us a powerful picture with some obvious realities. See, as the branches, we have to stay connected by abiding in the vine.

Otherwise, that branch withers and it dies. But if you want to thrive, if you want to bear fruit in this life, you stay connected to your source. You abide. You find your sustenance and your strength in Jesus Christ alone.

And listen, that happens when we obey. Now, look at me here at John chapter 15, where we're going to focus in on John 15 verse 10 and then verse 14.

Here's what Jesus says. He says, If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

[8:04] Verse 14. You are my friends if you do what I command. So very simple. We're talking today about obedience. So let me share one sentence with you that we'll break down into two parts.

The first part says this. Obedience to Christ is hard. Obedience to Christ is hard. Now, did you know that you and I are a lot like the Apostle Paul?

And you may say, No, no, Pastor. I would never, ever put myself on the same level as Paul. But I want you to watch this, because Paul gets just real honest and vulnerable with us here.

In Romans chapter 7, starting in verse 15, he says, I don't really understand myself. For I want to do what is right, but I don't do it.

Instead, I do what I hate. And then we skip down to verse 18. And he says, I know that nothing good lives in me. That is in my sinful nature. He said, I want to do what is right, but I can't.

[9:04] I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. Now, I wonder if I'm the only one who can relate to what Paul is saying.

I want with all my heart to walk intimately with Jesus, to follow Him faithfully. But why do I sometimes do the complete opposite of what I know I need to be doing?

Why does my pride, my selfishness, my insecurity often drive me? And listen, we're not here to make excuses for our disobedience. We are all about striving for holiness in Christ.

But we start at least by acknowledging that it's hard. Because as the old hymn says, we are prone to wander. So let me give you a few examples from God's Word, starting with the first man and woman.

So Adam and Eve were created to live together in the perfect paradise of the Garden of Eden with this command. Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[10:05] And what did they do? With great food, everything they needed all around them, they were deceived to eat from the forbidden tree, choosing disobedience, choosing to sin, and introducing fear and alienation, even death into mankind's formerly perfect relationships with God and one another.

Then we see their firstborn son. His name was Cain. And he chooses disobedience. And that leads to jealousy of his brother's obedience.

And that jealousy led to the awful choice to let his anger, to let his rage get the best of him. And he murders his brother Abel. Now, I have to stop and tell you kind of a funny story as I pick on a friend of mine.

In a previous church where we served, there was a guy named Cain. And he once told me that when he was younger and he met his eventual wife, he used a pickup line on her.

And he went up to her and he said something like this. He said, Hi, my name is Cain. You may have heard of me. I'm in the Bible. And I couldn't help myself.

[11:16] But I looked at him and I said, Dude, that's the worst pickup line ever. Cain was a murderer. Don't you realize that? Well, for whatever reason, it worked because they've been married for decades now. So what do I know?

But listen, the next example is Jonah. Jonah was a prophet of God who allowed his hatred toward a people group, towards the Ninevites, to lead him in the opposite direction of God's call to preach to these wicked people.

And finally, after being swallowed by a great fish, spending three days in the belly of a whale, he chose obedience. We even look at King David, a man after God's own heart, the most godly king to ever live, who served God so faithfully in so many ways.

And yet, there were some rough patches. In obedience, he stayed home when he should have been leading his army into battle. That's when he looked down from the roof in way too much idle time, and he saw a beautiful woman bathing.

And instead of turning away, he acted on his lust and committed adultery with this married woman named Bathsheba. Then he finds out she's pregnant.

[12:26] And instead of confessing his sin and getting his heart right before God, he attempts to cover it up by having her husband killed in battle, one of his own soldiers. And that snowball effect kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger until God dealt with his heart.

We even jump into the New Testament to a small passage in Galatians where we learn that Paul had to call out Peter's disobedience because he was showing favoritism to his fellow Jews while neglecting the Gentiles.

Now, I don't give those examples to say, well, it's really hard to be obedient to God, so who cares? Do whatever you want. Not at all. I share it to say, yeah, we all have this human condition to rebel and choose disobedience.

We all have this sinful nature. Yeah, the flesh with its selfishness and pride can be strong. The world and its ungodly ways are always trying to pull you away from obedience to Christ through his

word.

Yes, Satan and his army are real, and they will do everything in their power to steal, kill, and destroy you and your walk with Jesus. Those are real enemies that we face.

[13:33] And in your own power, you can't overcome them. And yet, and this is the good news, they don't even begin to compare to the God that we serve.

The power of the Holy Spirit living within you. See, if you are in Christ, you don't have to be controlled by the enemy. 1 John 4 says, Now let me take you to a little longer of a passage from Romans chapter 6, the first seven verses.

And if your Bible is still open to John 15, just go ahead and go forward two books. You'll go through the book of Acts, and then you'll come to Romans. Turn to Romans chapter 6.

We're going to start in verse 1. But the context here is, there's a lot of people, and even in Paul's day, that were basically just saying, Okay, I've been saved by grace, so I'm just going to go live however I want.

Kind of like you hear people, they get baptized, but they never end up living for Jesus. And they think that's their meal ticket to heaven. And sadly, they're going to be very deceived. But here's what it says.

[14:53] Here's his response to that mentality in Romans 6, starting in verse 1. He says, What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

And then very strongly in the Greek, he says, By no means we are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too, listen to this, may live a new life.

Verse 5. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him, so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

But here's the thing. So often I will sit down with people who want to talk about giving their life to Christ and getting baptized into him, and they will say something like this to me.

[16:06] They'll say, I just want to feel different. I just want to feel God's presence. And listen, of course we do. I get it. We all want that. And I also remind them that while God gave us emotions and feelings, and he can use them for his glory, I've had amazing times of worship where I felt his presence and power so strongly.

But we also need to understand that our faith isn't just a feeling or an experience. There are going to be times where you don't feel like worshiping him, where you don't feel like serving or giving faithfully from your resources, where you don't feel like loving the people around you, where you don't feel like choosing obedience over what seems like instant gratification of sin.

But we choose obedience to his word and his will. And as we choose that obedience, as we do the right thing, we start to abide more deeply in him, drawing even closer to Christ.

Because the secret to abiding is obedience. And while that's hard, our God specializes in doing what seems like the impossible.

Obedience to Christ is hard. But let me finish that sentence. Obedience to Christ is hard, but you'll never regret abiding in Jesus. You'll never regret that relationship, that abiding in Jesus.

[17:35] See, obedience is proof of abiding. And if we look back at our verses for today from John 15, 10 and 14, Jesus puts it like this. He says, If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

You are my friends, what? If you do what I command. So right away, we can see that obedience shows allegiance. It shows my allegiance.

Think about it this way. I know not everyone here is married that is listening to this, but I think this illustration will make sense if you are or not. In a marriage, you have a wonderful wedding day where you stand up and you make a commitment to your spouse.

My wife and I are getting ready to celebrate in just about a week. We're going to celebrate our 17th wedding anniversary. And so you will make a commitment that sounds something like this.

Ray, do you take this woman whose right hand you now hold to be your lawfully wedded wife and you promise before God and these witnesses that you will live with her according to God's word, that you will be to her a true and devoted husband, true to her in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and adversity, and that forsaking all others, you will keep yourself to her and her alone so as long as you both shall live.

[19:05] If so, say I do. Now, let me ask you married folks this question. Did you really in that moment have any idea of what that commitment would look like over the next 5, 10, 20, 50, 75 years?

Absolutely not. Because if we're honest, we were probably naive, which is okay. Everybody is before you have experience with something. And yet, life happens, right?

Having children doesn't always go the way we planned. Raising them is harder than any of us ever expected. And if we're not intentional, it can take a toll on our marriage. Communication can get harder the more we get to know each other, the more that honeymoon phase wears off.

Health struggles can creep in. Different seasons bring different challenges. And listen, it doesn't help that you both are going in all different directions, sometimes only seeing each other at the end of the day when you really don't have much energy left to give.

And I don't mean to, in any way, paint marriage in a negative light because it is a beautiful thing when it's done God's way, when Christ is in the center.

[20:13] All the ups and downs can create this beautiful bond like no other human relationship on this earth. And what I want you to see is that when you hold to those commitments that you made on your wedding day, you are showing allegiance.

When my wife loves me through the good and the bad, which she has done well, she is showing allegiance to our marriage covenant. When a pipe bursts in your kitchen and you're forced to relocate to basically a thousand square foot two bedroom apartment for nine months with three kids bickering with each other, not that I've ever had to do that, it really is an opportunity for you guys to grow closer.

When you lose a loved one and your heart is shattered into a thousand pieces and your spouse is your rock who holds you up in that moment, it deepens that marriage. Church, when we are obedient to our vows, we show our allegiance.

Listen, the same thing is true with Christ. We show our love to Him when we're obedient to His word. That it's more than just lip service. Jesus, you really do have my heart and therefore you have my obedience to follow you, whether it's easy or not, whether it's popular or not, whether I feel like it or not.

Obedience is a choice that shows my allegiance. And then also, obedience leads to God's blessings. If you're still in John chapter 15, I want you just to go backwards one book, one book to Luke chapter 5, and I want to start here in verse 1, Luke 5 verse 1, says, One day as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around Him and listening to the word of God.

[21:54] It's amazing what happens when we get out of the way and we let the word of God do what it does. Verse 2, He saw at the water's edge two boats left there by fishermen who were washing their nets.

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Simon answered, Master, we've worked all day and night, or worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, what powerful words, I will let down the nets.

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. I don't know exactly what Simon was thinking in his mind, but I wouldn't be shocked if it was something like this.

And we kind of get a little bit of a hint into this by his words, but it may have gone something like this. Come on, Jesus. Man, I've been in the water fishing all my life. This is what I do.

[22:58] This is what I know. There's nothing here. We've drug our nets all through this water. And I've been shocked. I haven't caught anything.

We're tired from being up all night. It's been an absolute business failure.

But I just heard you teach the word like no one I've ever seen. There's something special about you. Some even say that you are the Messiah. So, okay, I'll let down the net.

And what happens? They caught an absurd number of fish. Didn't even make sense. So much so that these professional grade nets began to break. And church, that never would have happened if Simon wasn't obedient to the Lord.

Because he said those words, because you say so, I will let down the nets. I will be obedient to your word, to what you call me to do.

In premarital counseling, knowing that so many couples have been indoctrinated with worldly and unbiblical views of dating and how you approach marriage, I teach them this simple phrase.

[24:01] When you do things God's way, you will get God's blessings. On the contrary, when we do things our way, we get human results.

And we wonder why marriages are failing at rates like we've never seen before, right? Or we wonder why I feel so distant from God. It's because he is calling us to obedience. And when we obey, we draw close to him and we walk in his blessings.

Oswald Chambers, the famous author, put it like this. He said, one step forward in obedience is worth years of study about it. Now, I've purposely waited until now, the last part of this message, to give the ultimate example, the perfect example of obedience.

His name, Jesus. God in the flesh, who was 100% human, even though it's hard to wrap our minds around 100% human, 100% God.

But he came in obedience from the perfection of heaven. He entered this bleak world. He taught a message of hope and forgiveness. And he was persecuted by the religious leaders. And then, because of his love for you and me, he endured awful suffering, going to the cross to take the punishment that you and I deserve for our sins.

[25:17] And yet, in obedience to the Father, as the perfect Son of God who had never sinned, he suffered like we will probably never understand and died in our place for our sin.

And because of his act of obedience, you and I are here today set free from our sins, walking in the hope and freedom of Christ. That is, if you've given your life to Jesus.

And listen, that should be the only motivation we need to walk in obedience. The perfect example of Christ. See, the secret to living is bearing fruit.

The secret to bearing fruit is abiding in Christ. And the secret to abiding is obedience to God's word. Yes, obedience, yeah, it can be hard.

But listen, you'll never regret abiding in that relationship with Christ. pray with me. Heavenly Father, we just thank you for your word today.

[26:18] We thank you for how you have just spoken truth into our hearts. And we are like Paul. We can relate and we can say what I want to do I don't always do.

And what I hate I often do. Lord, help me. Help me to trust you, to depend on you, to put my faith in you. Will you be my strength and will you get me out of the way so that I can truly follow your word and the Holy Spirit's leading every day.

So Father, we give you permission to do what we talked about last week, to prune, to make us more into the image of Christ. And we ask that you will show us how to trust you, even when we don't feel like it, to trust you and be obedient.

Thank you for your word today. We pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen. I want to give you this invitation. I don't know if you're in your car, you're at home, you're at work, where you are, but I want to give this invitation.

Most importantly, God wants to give you this invitation. If you've been listening to this and you don't know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, hey, I'm glad you're searching.

[27:30] I'm glad you're listening. And I believe with all my heart, like the word teaches, that if you are sincere, if you are truly seeking after truth, you will find it.

Then the truth will set you free. And I'll tell you, his name is Jesus. And he wants to come into your life, forgive every sin that you've ever committed, just like he's done for me.

He wants to set you on his solid rock. He wants to start that process of transforming your heart every day more and more into the image of Christ.

And listen, he wants to use you in incredible ways for the greatest purpose this world has ever known, for the kingdom of God. So if you'd like to have that conversation about, yes, I want to follow Jesus, we would love to come alongside you here at First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. You can reach out to us in a couple different ways. You can call the church office at 812-663-8488.

[28:33] That's 812-663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you, and I hope you have a great week.