

Weekly Devotions: TO LOVE GOD IS TO OBEY HIM 8

Without a Heart of Obedience Our Act of Obedience is Hypocritical

We can actually obey God for the wrong reason. We may obey God's law grudgingly, or obey in order to look good or to impress people. Like the Pharisees, outwardly they seemed to be obeying the Law but inwardly there was no genuine reverence for God. Jesus called that hypocrisy and confronted the Pharisees many times about the lack of sincerity in their hearts.

Occurring once in Psalm 26, the word 'hypocrite' is used exclusively in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Jesus used the word 13 times in Matthew; He urged the disciples to be true to their profession of faith and not to put up false pretenses, especially in the areas of alms giving, prayer and fasting (Matthew 6).

True obedience comes out of a genuine love for Jesus and a deep trust and respect for His words. Without this inward motivation of heart, our acts of obedience are superficial. To God what is important is not the acts of piety but a heart that trusts and loves Him resulting in a life of obedience to His word and expectations.

Read Matt 23: 23-36

Jesus often confronted the religious teachers of the Law and the Pharisees about their hypocrisy. They pretended to be righteous and close to God when in reality their heart is far away from Him.

In Matthew 23: 23-36, Jesus confronted them about their obsession with outward cleanliness and looking good on the outside but ignoring the impurities in their heart and neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness (25-28, 23). He also exposed their hypocrisy that while they built memorials for the prophets their fore-fathers killed; they themselves also persecuted and killed the prophets God sent to them (29-36). Because of their deceitful hearts, they were not able to distinguish between right and wrong and unable to understand what is truly important to God.

Questions to ponder

1. What did Jesus call the Pharisees who knew the Law and outwardly obeyed the Law (23, 24, 26, 27, 33)? What were they concerned about and what did they neglect / ignore (23, 25, 27-28, 30 & 34)?
2. In what ways are we like the Pharisees, a Christian outwardly but not inwardly? Are there things in the heart that you need to get rid of so that you can be 'clean' outwardly as well as inwardly?

Prepared by Rosalind Chen