

# The Expedience of Obedience

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**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:27–33, 41–6:1**

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## Introduction

**W**ould you take God's Word, please, and turn to Acts chapter 5. We're continuing our series, "That Old-Time Religion." Acts chapter 5 and while you're turning to it, and as soon as you have finished turning to it, would you look up here, and I want to ask you a question this morning: How many truly, happy, joyful, vibrant, and victorious Christians do you know? You might say, "Well, Pastor, not that many." I'm going to tell you the reason why we have so few. And really, folks, there are not a lot of people who are filled with joy. No Christian has a right to go around looking like the picture on his driver's license. But so many of us do. And what is the reason for this lack of joy? Well, that old song, "Trust and Obey," says: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." I want to talk to you about "The Expedience of Obedience." And I want you to read here, in Acts chapter 5. I begin in verse 29.

Now let me tell you when this passage took place. Peter and the other apostles have been teaching and preaching Jesus Christ, and it's caused quite a stir. It's caused quite an upset. Very frankly, it was a revival. And the civil magistrates and the religious authorities were trying to stop the revival. And so they commanded Peter and the other apostles not to preach anymore. And then, Peter begins in verse 29, which says, "Then

*Peter and the other apostles answered, and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5:29–32).*

Now the reason that so many Christians, today, are not filled with joy, victory, happiness, and accomplishment in the Christian life is because they are unbelieving and disobedient Christians. “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” Now we’re not saved because we obey, but we obey because we’re saved. Martin Luther said, “We’re not saved by faith and works. But we are saved by a faith that works.” Jesus said, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). And if you go to Heaven, dear friend, then I want to tell you that it’s gong to be because you trusted and obeyed. And if you don’t obey, then it’s a sign that you’ve really not trusted, because faith without works is dead. *When you go to Heaven, you’re not going to get there on the ladder of logic or on the rocket of reason, but on the railroad of redemption—the old “T and O”—trust and obey.* “For there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

## **I. The Reasons for Obedience**

### **A. He Is the Sovereign God**

Now I want to talk to you about obedience today—the missing ingredient in so many Christians’ lives. And first of all, let me give you the reasons for obedience—the reasons why you ought to obey. Now Peter says, “*We ought to obey...*” There’s an *ought-ness* to it. Why ought we to obey? Well, number one: because of who God is. He is the sovereign God. And He’s not a man. Peter says, in this passage of Scripture, “*We ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). Now a man may tell you to do something, and you may have some choice about it. But very frankly, folks, when God tells you to do something, you don’t have a logical, reasonable choice, because He is the sovereign God. He has every right to command His children. He is the God of creation. Jeremiah 11 and verse 3, says, “*Cursed be the man that obeyeth not...*” (Jeremiah 11:3). Because He’s the sovereign God, there can be no refusal and there can be no rebuttal.

There is only one alternative to obedience, and that is disobedience. And disobedience will bring the swift judgment of Almighty God. The Bible tells us in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, and verse 8, that when Jesus comes, He is coming “*in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

## B. He Is the Saving God

But not only is He the sovereign God. Let me give you another reason why we ought to obey Him: He is the saving God. He is the saving God. Look at this passage of Scripture again—verses 30 and 31: *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree”*—He loved us enough that He gave His Son to die for us—*“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 5:30–31). Oh, my dear friend, here’s a greater reason for obeying Him: Not only is He the sovereign God, He’s also the saving God who suffered, bled, and died for us.

Did you know that the word *ought* derives from the word *owe*? The word *ought* and the word *owe* are connected. Why do we obey Him? We owe it to Him. We’re not our own. We’re bought with a price.

But drops of grief can never repay the debt of love I owe;  
Here Lord, I give myself away; 'tis all that I can do. (Isaac Watts)

Men ought to obey God. He suffered, He bled, and He died for us. It is the basest form of ingratitude to fail to obey our great God.

Jesus said, in John 14 and verse 15: *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* God doesn’t want us to serve Him because we have to, but because we desire to and because our motive is love. Why should we obey? Because He’s the sovereign God—He’s not a man—and, because He’s the saving God. He has saved us and redeemed us.

## II. The Requirements for Obedience

Enough said on that subject. Let me move to the second subject. Not only do I want to talk to you, for a few moments, about the reasons for obedience, but let me just narrow it down a little bit and talk to you about the requirements for obedience. Would you like to obey? Would you like to be happy in Jesus? Would you like to have victory in your life? All right, now, let me tell you what kind of obedience we need.

### A. Intelligent Obedience

First of all, we need intelligent obedience—intelligent obedience. I mean, you can’t obey unless you know what it is that God wants you to do. Now you see, back in chapter 4, verse 20, the apostles had said, *“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:20). We saw it. We heard it. We’re not just running around doing things for God without knowing what God wants us to do. You know, many folks are doing things for God that God doesn’t want done.

I heard about two little boys who were Boy Scouts. They went out to do their good deeds for the day, and they came back to the scout troop, and they were all bruised and

battered. And they said, “What happened to you?” They said, “Well, we helped a little old lady across the street.” “Well, why are you so beat up?” “She didn’t want to go.” Now there are a lot of people who are doing things like that for God—things that God doesn’t want done. Our obedience to God must be intelligent obedience. You must know the will of God.

## **B. Intentional Obedience**

And because it must be intelligent obedience, ladies and gentlemen, it must be intentional obedience. You must intend to obey. You must seek the will of God. You must want to know the will of God. Now if you don’t know the will of God, then that doesn’t mean that you’re excused, because you should know the will of God. You ought to intend to know the will of God. There ought to be a quiet time in your life, everyday, where you report in for orders and say, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” Not: “Lord, what do you want others to do?” And not: “Lord, what do others want me to do?” But: “Lord, what would you have me to do? Lord, inhabit my humanity. Lord, think through my mind. Lord, smile through my countenance. Lord, work through my hands. Lord, love through my heart. Lord, speak through my lips. Here Lord, I report for duty.”

When I was a boy, and my dad used to get that there’s-work-to-be-done-around-this-house look in his eye, I would make myself scarce, and so would my brother. We would just kind of saturate the place with our absence, because there was work to be done. Now if our dad said, “Do this and do that,” we knew that, if we didn’t do it, then we’d be chastised. We’d be disciplined. But we figured out that, if he didn’t tell us, then we weren’t disobedient, because we weren’t there to be told. Did you ever do that when you were a kid?

Now some of us are the same way about God. We think, “Well, it’s not our fault that we don’t know the will of God.” Now I’ll tell you why it is your fault: You make yourself scarce when God wants to speak to you. You have not reported to the Lord. You’ve not said, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” Do you have a quiet time? Dear friend, ignorance of God’s will is no excuse. Did you hear me? Ignorance of God’s will is no excuse. And God will hold you accountable for what you hear. And God will hold you accountable for what you would have heard, if you had listened.

## **C. Immediate Obedience**

Now listen. Your obedience—number one—it must be intelligent obedience. And because it must intelligent obedience, it must be intentional obedience. These apostles had set their hearts and their minds to do anything that the Lord Jesus wanted them to do. Now number three: because it is an intelligent obedience; and because it is an intentional obedience, it is immediate obedience. It must be immediate obedience. Now notice verses 27 and following, “*And when they had brought them, they set them before*

*the council; and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we strictly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Now watch this—"Then Peter and the other apostles answered, and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior" (Acts 5:27–31).*

Now I want you to get this point: While the high priest is telling Peter not to preach, Peter is preaching—I mean, at the same time. While the breath is still in the mouth of the high priest, saying, “Did we tell you not to preach this any more?” Peter’s saying, “God raised Him up. He’s the Lord. He’s the Savior.” The moment that he said not to do it, Peter’s doing it—I mean, the same moment. Now Peter is not questioning. There is no reserve. There’s no backup. There’s no lag in between. Now listen, folks. When God tells you to do something, don’t look around to see if the circumstances are favorable; and don’t wait around to see if you’ll do it tomorrow or the next day. Don’t just parade it past the judgment bar of your mind to see whether it’s reasonable or not—whether you ought to do it. Do it immediately. Did you know that procrastination is a form of disobedience? Did that sink in? Procrastination is a form of disobedience. You may not know why God wants you to do it. You just simply do it.

I read, years and years ago, of a monument built on a mountainside, to a dog. It was built there, by the master, in loving memory of that dog. What had happened is this: This man, with his dog and a friend, were standing there, near a precipice. And the owner of the dog was pointing something out to the friend, and he pointed like this, over the side of the mountain. That dog thought it was his master’s command, and leaped over the mountainside to his death—instant obedience to his master. I wonder if I’m like that—willing to obey my master. Obviously, the dog was only a dog. And obviously, the man was only a man, but let’s just apply that to the sovereign God who can never command us to do wrong.

When He speaks, we must answer Him. The reason that so many of us do not have victory in our lives is that we do not answer immediately.

Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!

Our God is marching on. (Julia Ward Howe)

That obedience to our Lord must be intelligent. And because it is intelligent, it must be intentional. And because it is an intentional obedience, it must be immediate obedience.

Ours is not to reason why.

Ours is but to do and die. (Alfred Lord Tennyson)

We must obey our Lord.

#### D. Inflexible Obedience

And then, let me say next, that this obedience must be inflexible obedience, regardless of the circumstances. Notice in verse 33—it talks about the enemies of the gospel, and the Bible says, *“When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them”* (Acts 5:33). That means that these men’s lives were in danger—actual, physical danger. And yet, in the face of that danger, with inflexibility, they stood and they said, *“We ought to obey God rather than men,”* regardless of the consequences. There can be no compromise with this obedience, even in the face of death. *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

We had Joseph Tson, who was here, a great Romanian pastor of a large Baptist church in Romania. The communists came to Joseph Tson—some of you heard him tell this story—and they said, “Mr. Tson, we’re going to let you continue to preach, but you must register as a State preacher. And if you register, then we will allow you to preach. But if you don’t register, then you’ll not be allowed to preach.” Joseph Tson had to think about that: “Should I register with the communists? If I do, I will be able to stay as pastor of this church, and I will be able to preach. But,” he said, “if I register, then I no longer can say that God only is sovereign—now I must say that the State is sovereign. Now there will be a certain amount of control and strings on my message.”

He went alone with God to the mountain to pray. And he fasted and prayed, and fasted and prayed, and prayed it through, until he had the mind of God and a word from God. And God said, “Joseph, don’t register. Don’t do it.” Joseph Tson went back to his wife—she was here too—lovely lady. He said to her, “God has said that I am not to register.” They prayed it through. It would be worse on her than him, if they killed him. He would go to Heaven. She would be left behind to face it all. But they prayed it through. They got down on their knees and said, “We’re going to trust God. We’re going to obey God rather than men.”

The communist official came the next day. By the way, Joseph said that he and his wife went to bed that night and slept like babies. The next morning, the communist official came and said, “Mr. Tson, are you willing to register?” He said, “Sir, I will not register.” He said, “Mr. Tson, do you know what we can do to you?” He said, “I’m aware of what you can do to me. I’m aware that you have the power of the State, and I’m aware that you have the power, actually, to take my life. But ” he said, “I want you to know that your greatest weapon is killing. But let me tell you what my greatest weapon is: My greatest weapon is dying.” He said, “What?” “Yes, dying,” he said. He said, “What do you mean, Mr. Tson?” He said, “You see,” he said, “I preach the gospel by radio. I have preached the gospel by cassette tape. I have preached the gospel from the pulpit. I have preached the gospel in printed sermons; and, people know the life that I’ve lived, and they know the truth that I preach.” He said, “Now if you kill me, then you’re going to

baptize every message, every tape, every sermon, and every book that I've issued, in my blood. It will be sprinkled with my blood, and people will know that I believe what I have preached enough to die for it; and there will be more believers. So," he said, "I want to tell you that, if you use your weapon, then I'll be forced to use mine."

That communist official went back and said, "Leave Tson alone. He's crazy. He's crazy." Today, Joseph Tson, the head of Romanian Missionary Society, is beaming the gospel all over Romania, because here was a man who said, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

I think of John Bunyan, that great preacher of the gospel, back in seventeenth century England—John Bunyan, the non-conformist. They said to him, "Mr. Bunyan, you must register to preach the gospel, if you would preach the gospel in England." He said, "I'll have no strings on my message. I will not register." They put him there, in that prison—dark, damp, and dirty, with vermin and lice. He didn't even have a bed to sleep on. He had a little girl who had epilepsy. He had a wife who was living in poverty. They closed the doors of his church. Other preachers had signed—they were preaching, and their churches were open. But John Bunyan was there in prison, and he said, "I will not sign. I will not." They put the license right outside his jail cell. All that he had to do was just to reach through the bars, pick it up, and sign it—just sign it—and they would open the doors, and he would be free. But he stayed in that prison and he refused to obey men rather than God. And while he was in prison, he wrote the book that you ought to know and love—Pilgrim's Progress. And every time that you read it, you'll read that it's written by a man who said, "We ought to obey God rather than men"—which exhibits an inflexible obedience, because God is God. And even in the face of the fact that these could take counsel to slay them, they said, "We're going to obey God."

### **E. Impassioned Obedience**

Now friend, I want to tell you that, not only should that obedience be an inflexible obedience, but, dear friend, that obedience ought also to be an impassioned obedience—an impassioned obedience. Notice how they obeyed the Lord with great joy. I mean, look, if you will, here in verses 41 and 42: "*And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ*" (Acts 5:41–42).

Dear friend, they did it with a burning, blazing, passionate, and emotional zeal. Do you have zeal to obey God? I mean, not just do you obey Him, but also do you obey Him with gladness? The Bible says, "*Serve the LORD with gladness*" (Psalm 100:2). *I believe that the cause of Jesus Christ has been hurt more by Sunday morning benchwarmers than by all the infidels put together*—people who just kind of drag their

feet. They have no joy, no zest.

“Hmm,” some of them say, “well, I’m a moderate.” Friend, you can’t be moderate about Jesus Christ. You can’t be moderate about the Bible. You can’t be moderate about Heaven, nor about Hell. Jesus Christ said to that church at Laodicea, *“Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...I will spew thee out of my mouth”* (Revelation 3:16–17). That is, figuratively, “You make me want to regurgitate.” *God would rather have you out and out against Him than half-hearted, pretending to be for Him. A man who is faithful to his wife part of the time is not faithful at all.*

Dear friend, we are to be out and out for Jesus Christ. There’s to be a zeal for serving the Lord. We’re to serve Him with gladness, with all of our heart, with fullness, with joy, and with enthusiasm. God forgive our half-hearted obedience to the things of God. These disciples loved the Lord so much that the Bible says that they departed from this council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Some people believe that they’ve done God a favor when they get here on Sunday morning. *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

### **III. The Rewards of Obedience**

Now last of all, I’ve talked to you about the reasons for obedience. He is the sovereign God. He is the saving God. I’ve talked to you about the requirements for obedience. We ought to obey God as these men obeyed God, so long ago. Now let me talk to you about the rewards of obedience, all right? What are the rewards of obedience? Well, there are many, but our text especially points out three that I want to mention to you today.

#### **A. Supernatural Power in the Life**

The first reward of obedience is supernatural power in the life—supernatural power in the life. Notice, in verse 32: *“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit”—are you listening?—“whom God hath given to them that obey him”* (Acts 5:32). *“So is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”* You say, “Well, I don’t have spiritual power.” Have you been obeying God? *Would you give the keys to a high-powered, expensive, brand new automobile to a rebellious and disobedient son? I don’t think so. I know that God is not going to lavish spiritual power upon rebels.* I know this: that when you bring your life into conformity to the will of God, when you say, “Oh Lord, my desire, my ambition, the driving motive of my heart and my life is to obey you,” then God says, “All right now, I’m going to release spiritual power through you.” Do you want power in your life? Do you have power in your life? Not without obedience, you don’t, and you never will.

## B. Supernatural Joy in the Heart

The second reward of obedience is this: not only is there supernatural power in the life, but there's supernatural joy in the heart. Look in verse 41: *"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name"* (Acts 5:41). You say to me, "Brother Rogers, I just don't have any joy in my Christianity. It's just dull. It's just boring. It's insipid. I just don't have any victory. Jesus Christ is not real to me." Well, if Jesus Christ is not real to you, then I'll tell you why: it's because you're not obeying Him. Let me give you a verse of scripture—John 14 and verse 21: *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me..."* (John 14:21).

Now folks, let's just stop there, for a moment. Don't say that you love Jesus, if you don't obey Him. That's empty talk. *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me"*—now listen—*"and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21). Do you know what the word *manifest* means, boys and girls? It means this: I'll make myself known to you; I'll be real to you. The reason that Jesus Christ is not real to many people is that they're not obeying Him, and He's not manifesting Himself to them. Can you say:

And He walks with me, and He talks with me  
And He tells me I am His own,  
And they joy we share as we tarry there  
none other has ever known. (Austin Miles)

Can you say, "It's real. It's real. It's real"? Not if you're not obeying. Not if you're not obeying. *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and I will manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21).

## C. Salvation Victory in the Church

There will be spiritual power in the life. There will be supernatural joy in the heart. And there will be salvation victory in the church. We're going to see souls saved by great numbers. I want you just to notice in verse 29: *"We ought to obey God"* (Acts 5:29). Well, what has God told us to do? It's to witness. Look in verse 32: *"And we are his witnesses of these things"* (Acts 5:32). Yes. Now look in verse 42: *"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"* (Acts 5:42). Now look in chapter 6, verse 1: *"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..."* (Acts 6:1). It makes sense, doesn't it? We ought to obey God. We are witnesses. *"They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ...[and] the number of the disciples was multiplied"* (Acts 5:42–6:1). When, my dear friend, there's supernatural power in the life, and supernatural joy in the heart, there's going to be

supernatural victory in the church. Now we're going to see great multitudes of people come to Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Now I want you to look at your pastor, right now, and understand that what I'm telling you, I'm telling you in love. But the majority of the members of this church are not obedient to the Lord. You're not. The reason that I know that you're not is that you're not witnessing. You're not sharing Jesus Christ. You haven't prepared. You say, "I don't know how." Well, learn how. You say, "Well, I don't have opportunity." Well, make the opportunity. I am telling you, ladies and gentlemen, that the only alternative for obedience is disobedience. Acts, chapter 6, and verse 1, says that the number of the disciples was multiplied. Evangelism in the average church doesn't even make good addition, but it's supposed to be multiplication. A church this size ought to see multiplied thousands saved every year. Isn't that right? We ought to. But it is not we who can do it, unless we obey the Lord. The best advice that was ever given to anyone was what Mary gave to the servants there at that wedding in Cana of Galilee, when she said to them, "*Whatever he saith unto you, do it*" (John 2:5). Do it. "*Whatever he saith unto you, do it.*"

Stephen Grellet was a missionary back in the pioneer days of the United States of America. He was a Quaker evangelist preacher and missionary. He was out on the western borders of our nation—at the foot of the Rockies. He was praying and seeking the face of God. He felt that inner urge—that word from the Lord—that said he was to go to a certain lumber camp and preach an evangelistic message. He checked it out, and felt in his spirit that it was a word from God. Has God ever just spoken to you where you just knew it was God speaking? He just felt that it was God speaking. And God said that he was to go.

So he went to this particular lumber camp, and he expected to preach a revival crusade. When he got there, there was not a soul in the lumber camp—not a one. He looked around, and he thought, "Well, maybe they're over at the mess hall." Stephen Grellet went over to the mess hall. He thought, "Maybe there'll be a cook there, or somebody." There was no one there. He said, "Lord, you've told me to come and preach. I don't understand it, but I'm going to be obedient." And he stood in that empty mess hall and preached his heart out. He just preached Jesus. He preached salvation. He pled for souls to be saved, in an empty place. And then, he gave an invitation for people to receive Christ. And then, had a benediction and went his way, satisfied that he'd been obedient—not understanding it all.

Years later, across the ocean, Stephen Grellet was on the London Bridge, standing there, when a heavy hand dropped on his shoulder and a voice said, "Are you Stephen Grellet?" He said, "I am." This man said, "I've been looking the world over for you. I want

to speak to you. Do you remember going to thus and such a lumber camp at the foot of the Rockies and preaching a sermon to an empty mess hall?" "Yes." "You thought no one heard you. But," he said, "I heard you." He said, "I was the foreman of the crew. We were out in the woods cutting trees. But I came back for another ax." He said, "I heard you in there preaching. And I stood behind a stack of wood, and I listened to you, and I was ashamed to make myself known. But what you said penetrated my heart and brought me under conviction. And," he said, "I went back into the woods, and I gave my heart to Jesus Christ. And," he said, "I went back and shared what happened with three other lumberjacks, and all three of them gave their heart to Jesus Christ. And," he said, "I want you to know, sir, that the four of us have become missionaries and evangelists, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ."

There was a man who was obedient—not knowing why—but just simply obedient. We are witnesses, doing what God tells us to do. Dear friend, when we begin to obey God—I mean, really obey God—we're going to get back to "That Old-Time Religion" and New Testament Christianity in this twentieth-century. "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Let us pray. Heads are bowed. Eyes are closed. Is there an area of disobedience in your life? Is God telling you to make restitution? Obey Him. Is God telling you to make confession? Obey Him. Is God telling you to witness? Obey Him. Is God telling you to tithe? Obey Him. Obey Him. We ought to obey God. He is the sovereign God. He is the saving God.

Father, I pray that you will bring us—every one—to a point, not only where we obey when we hear, but, Lord, where we will actually seek to hear what you want us to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.