



LOVE GOD OBEY GOD

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DEFINED

Lives and abides by what God says is best, not out of obligation but out of the joy of being fully accepted in and by Christ.

"I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ; therefore, I obey."
- Timothy Keller

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DESCRIBED

You might recall the title of the 1887 hymn, "When We Walk with the Lord". The chorus is well known:

"Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey."

Central to our relationship with God is His call to trust and obey Him. Jesus said, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23). Notice the language: *love, Father, home*. To know and love God is to obey Him. It's only in the context of both trusting and obeying that we can experience intimate relationship with God. A lack of trusting and obeying was what caused the Israelites to wander for 40 years, struggling relationally with God and missing out on the blessings He'd prepared for them in the promised land.

Like the Israelites, we all fall short of perfect obedience. Thankfully, it's not our obedience that saves us, but God's grace (unmerited favor) alone. "For it is by grace you have been saved ... not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Apostle Paul understood this when he said he would "never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14a). Even on our best days of obeying God, there's nothing for us to boast in. Our right standing before God is not because we have been good, but because Jesus is good and His sacrificial death brought about complete forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation. Because of this, we now can obey God out of joy and thanksgiving for this inexpressible gift of grace.

Sadly, the grace of God is often abused by "ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (Jude 1:4b). The cross of Christ is not a license to get away from God so that we can do our own thing. The cross of Christ makes it possible to get close to God, so we can follow Him and live fully in the abundant life that He offers. If God is all-knowing and all wise, we can trust that He knows what's best for our lives and our flourishing.

While the command to "obey" can feel weighty, Scripture shows us that obeying God's commands are "not burdensome," for it is when we obey God that we "overcome the world" (1 John 5:3). It's in obedience that we are truly free, for God's commands are not based on the current situation in the world, but on the way it was meant to be.

Grace is not only a means of salvation and forgiveness, but Scripture tells us that grace is also the foundation and means of our spiritual growth. "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people [and it also] teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age ... Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14).

It is by grace through faith in Christ that we are saved, and it is by grace through faith in Christ that we learn to trust and obey. As God urges His people in Deuteronomy 30:19, "I set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life"! God wants what's best for us and knows that He alone can offer the best. It's in obedience to Him that He is able to bless us and protect us from the curse of this broken world until He returns!

EVIDENCE OF THIS SPIRITUAL OUTCOME IN A PERSON'S LIFE

- Can identify an increase in desire to love God and love neighbor.
- Can identify growth in, not only what it means to obey God, but the why behind it.
- Submits to God's Word and trusts God's heart behind it, even when not understood completely.
- Recognizes the Spirit's conviction and guidance and actively applies this guidance to one's life.

GUIDANCE

Read each passage multiple times. Then write your observations about the passage and any thoughts you have from the discernment question. What do you notice in the passage, and what does this reveal about your life?

DEUTERONOMY 30:11-20

Observations:

Discernment Question: What is your perspective on obeying God? Do you believe (in your heart and head) that God has your best interest in mind? Why or why not?

JOSHUA 24:14-15

Observations:

Discernment Question: Is this true of your own household? Would people be able to look at your life and see clearly Whom you serve? If not, what might they see?

PROVERBS 1:10-19

Observations:

Discernment Question: In your current season of life, where do you feel pressured to not follow God? If it's people, who are those people? If it's circumstances, what are those circumstances?

JOHN 14:15-24

Observations:

Discernment Question: Jesus said that if we love God we will keep His words. What do you love about God that inspires you to want to obey Him?

EPHESIANS 5:1-21

Observations:

Discernment Question: These passages name numerous common areas of disobedience: sexual immorality, covetousness, foolish talk, crude joking, drunkenness, etc. Which of these are you most susceptible to in your current season of life?

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21

Observations:

Discernment Question: This passage references those whose “god is their belly.” What fleshly appetites are you obeying rather than obeying God? Why are they a challenge for you?

COLOSSIANS 3:5-17

Observations:

Discernment Question: What most grabs your attention in this passage, the things you’re called to get rid of or the things you’re called to do more of? Why?

TITUS 2:11-14

Observations:

Discernment Question: This passage exhorts us to “wait” for our hope, Jesus Christ, rather than engage in worldly passions. In other words, we must live in this world with unfulfilled desires because these desires will be fulfilled in Christ, not in this world’s cheap substitutes. How good are you at waiting? How does this affect your obedience?

1 JOHN 2:15-17

Observations:

Discernment Question: This passage identifies three categories: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Which of these do you most battle with in your current season of life? Why?

1 JOHN 5:3

Observations:

Discernment Question: Do you find God's commands burdensome or liberating? Why?

JUDE 1:4

Observations:

Discernment Question: What is your view of grace? Do you use grace as a license to sin or as power to overcome sin?

NEXT STEPS

What are practical next steps you will do based on what you have discovered in this survey of Scripture about obeying God? Include insights offered from others in your Life Group that could be applied in your own life, as well.

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

James 1:22, NIV

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

1 John 5:3, NIV

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.



LOVE GOD OBEY GOD

TAKE THE NAME

Number three in the list of the 10 Commandments delivered by Moses on Mount Sinai:

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7 NASB)

Many of us may have grown up understanding this as a commandment not to use God's name as a cuss word. Of course, using God's name as a means of expressing frustration or anger is obviously wrong and irreverent, but this understanding misses the *weight* of true meaning behind this command.

What does it mean to “*take the name of the LORD your God in vain?*”

For starters, note that all the letters of LORD are capitalized. This is meant to tip us off. In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, there are two words we translate "Lord": *Adonai* and *Yahweh*. *Adonai* is the general term for Lord. It is used of masters, bosses, and leaders. Translators let us know the Hebrew word underneath the English *Lord* is *Adonai* by using lower case letters: Lord.

The name, Yahweh, carries much more weight because it is the personal name of God. It is a derivative of God's description of Himself to Moses. When asked His name, God said to Moses, “*I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'*” (Exodus 3:14). The name here actually encapsulates "being," it's basically saying His name is, "I AM Who I AM, I WILL BE Who I WILL BE." This demonstrates God's complete and eternal self-existence.

It would have been weird for Moses to use this name to describe God since it's in the first person, so God gives him the name "Yahweh," which translates in Hebrew, "He Will Be." Over time, the Israelites wanted to recognize the holy and sacred name of their God, so when they read the Scriptures out loud (which was a common practice), they would replace the divine name of Yahweh with the Hebrew word for Lord, "Adonai." So, when they began translating the Hebrews Scriptures into English, translators honored the tradition by translating God's personal name as, LORD. Therefore, when we see this word in all caps, we know that this is the replacement for Yahweh.

Now that we have taken note of the weightiness and holiness of the LORD's very name, let's talk about what it means to “take” this name.

The Hebrew word for "take" here is *Nasa*. *Nasa* is translated as: *take, carry, lift, lift up, bear, or bear up*. Contrast this with another Hebrew word: *Amar*. *Amar* is translated to *speak, to say*. If this command was just about speaking God's name, we would expect the Hebrew word *Amar*. We don't get *Amar*. We get *Nasa*.

So, what does it mean to lift, carry or bear a name?

When we lift a name, carry a name, or bear a name, we take that name as our own. We identify with that name. We represent that name. When we bear a name, we proclaim to the world that we want to be associated with that name. When a bride chooses to take the name of her groom, the action could be described by *Nasa*. She bears the new name.

So, what is God's concern in this? “*Don't associate with My name in vain. Don't claim to carry My name but have it take no effect in your life. Don't bear My name, carry My name, take My name as your own but in your heart of hearts have no real interest in Me.*”

As God's people, His representatives in the world, it mattered tremendously how they acted. Why? Because when people saw the Israelites, they associated them with the God they served. And, if the Israelites acted wickedly, this would reflect on the character of God and the nations' perception of Him. It would defame and desecrate His Name. Remember, God chose Israel to be "a light to the nations," that is, the world was supposed to be able to look at Israel and see the LORD (See Isaiah 49:6). This is what the 10 commandments were for, to give them guidelines that would keep them in close relationship with the LORD and enable them to be lights to the nations, pointing them to the One True God.

In light of all this, we should be convinced that obedience is not arbitrary. The LORD did not make up all the rules and regulations just to exercise His power over His people or to keep them enslaved to His every whim (much like the vengeful, angry, gluttonous gods of their neighbors). **Israel's obedience to Yahweh was not just for their own good, but the good of the whole world!**

Sadly, the Israelites failed to keep this important commandment to not take the LORD's name in vain. They became more interested in what God could do for them instead of drawing near to Him in relationship. They failed to fear Him and operate out of a proper understanding of who Yahweh is. God grieves this trajectory of His people in Isaiah:

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13a).

To carry the name Yahweh in vain, as demonstrated here, is to give lip service but lack a truly dedicated heart and the fruit that comes from it. Because of this disconnect, the Israelites operated no differently from their surrounding nations, who sought their own gods for the things they wanted and not for relationship.

Jesus grieved the same thing: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). Or He could have said, "Why are you taking my name in vain? You say I'm your Lord, but your actions say otherwise." To love Christ is to obey Him.

C.S. Lewis put it like this:

"To have Faith in Christ means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you."— C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

There is no greater good than to know the LORD and enjoy a relationship with Him forever. And, since God delights in and longs for relationship with us, it makes perfect sense that obeying Him is the best way we can love Him.

THE MAGIC WAND

But we hold the magic wand, right? Obedience is good, but it's not obligatory. We're saved by grace. The cross covers all that. Wave the magic wand of grace, and we need not worry about hypocrisy. Let's not get legalistic. Let's not say obedience is needed. Wouldn't that contradict the message of the cross? Don't we say we're saved by grace and not by works? If we make obedience obligatory, aren't we compromising grace? Aren't we saying the cross isn't really needed?

Not exactly.

Actually, not at all.

The cross of Christ can be likened to a key that opens a door. The purpose of the key is to allow the key holder to enter into a room. If that person has no interest in going into that room, the key is effectively useless for that person.

The cross is not for those who want to live their lives running from God's presence and God's ways. Why hold the key for a room you don't want to enter? That key is not needed or useful if the room is unwanted. The wondrous gift of the cross is the gift of grace and forgiveness for those who want God to be their God. The cross is useless to those pursuing another god even if they're pretending God is their God. Their true god, whatever it may be, is accessible

through other means. If their god is riches, then riches come through hard work, not the cross. If their god is unbridled sexual expression, then they do not need the cross to get this. The person who takes God's name in vain does not need the cross to get to their true god any more than the person on the street needs the door for a building he has no intention of entering. The cross brings awe-inspiring grace and forgiveness for those who want the presence of God in their lives.

Scripture puts it like this:

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Why claim grace, why claim the cross, if you don't truly want to approach the God of that grace? Why flaunt the key to the room you never intend to enter? If you want to run from God — disobey God — then you don't need the cross. The cross makes available the ongoing presence of God for those who want the ongoing presence of God, those who want to follow God, those who want to obey God. It is the most stunning gift available.

TAKING GOD'S NAME IN VAIN

Let's talk about what taking the LORD's name in vain might look like in today's day by observing three ways this is explained in Scripture.

First, there's **legalism**. Legalism is adhering to a moral law without the presence of faith. Legalists know the trappings of faith, but at their core, are still pledging allegiance to something other than God. They look to their own interests, rather than the interests of others, which is the interest of God, the very thing that Jesus says is the greatest commandment:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-38).

Legalists may attend church, but church attendance is a means of gaining spiritual points, maybe to make up for the ways they ignored God throughout the week rather than gathering with others to worship and to lean into God for strength and guidance. They may know and read the Bible, but rather than use their knowledge to grow closer to the Lord and love others more, their knowledge is a point of pride. Knowing Scripture inflates their ego and self-righteousness instead of feeding their souls and leading them to be like Christ in the way they live. They may generously support the church financially, but think that their contribution is enough to right their wrongs before God. Legalists do lots of good things, thinking that it's their obedience, not Christ's, that saves them.

Next, there's **hypocrisy**. Hypocrisy is the act of claiming to have faith and a relationship with God while one's actions claim this opposite. James, in his New Testament letter, is ultimately challenging the way believers live and pointing them toward the wisdom of abiding by Jesus' summary of the commandments we just read in Matthew 22. He uses the metaphor of a mirror to explain the dangers of hypocrisy:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it - not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it - they will be blessed in what they do. (1:22-25)

James further explains that faith is not true faith without action that stems from love:

*But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."
Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds...
As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (2:18, 26)*

He goes on to show what "doing" the word and true faith means in God's eyes:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (1:27)

Another way we see this characteristic of a hypocrite is when they say they care about loving their poor and yet, they only give attention to those in their congregation who can benefit them the most. James warns of this kind of hypocrisy:

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (2:1-4)

All of these examples demonstrate that our worship of God and bearing His name is most pure when it comes from a place of loving others, not using others.

The last way one falsely takes God's name is through **licentiousness** (no regard for rules or standards). The licentious are those who view grace as a license to do what they really want to do: disobey God. It's rarely stated blatantly. More commonly, it is stated with an air of humility. Struggle with sin is thought to be a badge of authenticity. To overcome sin would compromise this authenticity, so rather than appear plastic, they revel in their sin. Reveling in sin is viewed as a deeper understanding of grace, and those who challenge this understanding are viewed as legalists. Grace no longer moves them away *from* sin, as grace is intended, but gives them the ability *to* sin, even if they pretend they don't like it. The licentious take the name of the Lord, but they miss the point of grace, and actually take His name in vain. But, grace is not a license to run from God. Grace opens the door to be close to God.

Jude challenges the licentious with this:

For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord (Jude 1:4).

STORY OF OUR LIVES

So what do we do with this? How do we recognize where we might be falling into one of these areas of taking God's name in vain?

A clue is given by stepping back and viewing Scripture's landscape. Jesus said, "Each tree is recognized by its own fruit" (Luke 6:44a).

In other words, we know what's inside a tree by observing its fruit. Stories display fruit. As God inspired Scripture, He didn't just want to tell us what it means to love Him; He painted pictures through stories. Through these stories, we see both authentic and inauthentic love for God on display. The stories display fruit from lives lived before us. Seeing this fruit helps us discern our own lives as well, which leads to important questions.

What does the story of your life display?

Does the story of your life display legalism? Are you "doing" the Christian thing to somehow earn God's favor? Do you seek to obey God by faith or impress God by your goodness? Do you judge those who fall short?

Does the story of your life display hypocrisy? Do you talk a big talk when it comes to your faith, but don't walk the walk? Do you participate in the disciplines of the Christian life, but only when it is in your best interest? Do you see yourself as better than others?

Or, does the story of your life display licentiousness? Do you truly want to overcome? Do you want to obey? When you think about repeating patterns of sin in your life, do you believe obedience is both possible and desirable? Or, do you secretly love your sin and take pride in your openness with your struggles? Are you good at confession but not so good at repentance?

CONDEMNATION VERSUS CONVICTION

As we consider these questions, a critical distinction must be made: condemnation or conviction. Using different language, Paul makes this distinction when writing the church in Corinth:

Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

Godly sorrow — conviction — is a good thing, a good kind of pain. We see our sin and its effects; we want to be free from it, so we repent, turn from our sin, and move forward in the freedom of God's gift of grace. This kind of sorrow results in transformation just like we see in the situation with the Corinthian church.

Worldly sorrow — condemnation — is different. Condemnation is when we see our sin, and we are defeated and demoralized by it. Rather than humbly repenting and receiving Christ's grace, we hold onto our failures and let them weigh us down. This kind of sorrow does not result in freedom or transformation, but leaves us stuck in regret; it does not bring life, but death.

As we consider authentic obedience, we must recognize the power of Christ's death on the cross for forgiveness and the power of the Spirit for obedience. Paul pointed to both the death of Christ and the life of Christ when he described the new life available to us.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 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 may live a new life (Romans 6:1-4).

Did you hear that? We, too, may live a new life! There is a new life available to us.

Obedience is not an obligation but an opportunity. No longer must we pretend we are better than we truly are (legalism), and no longer must we revel in the mud pit (license). New life is available to us, a life that pleases God and displays Him to others. Remember, you bear God's name in the World. Your obedience, just as the Israelites', is not only for your benefit, but is the greatest way God will be made known to your generation and the ones to come.

As you consider your struggles, you are encouraged to do so in the context of hope. Because of Jesus, and because of God's Spirit, we have hope. Therefore, we can — and must — live differently.



LOVE GOD OBEY GOD

INTRODUCTION

The exercise that follows is simple. It is so simple, in fact, that it could be faked. The questions are not lengthy or complex. The time needed to fill in the blanks may take only minutes.

Or the exercise could take time, be profound, and change your life. Very simply, you're asked to do two things.

1. Talk with God about you.
2. Talk with at least one other person about you.

The curious thing about hypocrisy and disobedience is that while they are almost immediately evident in others, they can be difficult to see in ourselves. As hypocrites, we are masters of self-justification. So, if you really want to discover if there are areas of hypocrisy in your own life, asking others is a powerful tool.

You will ask God and others two questions, which address legalism and licentiousness. Given the nature of these questions, consider carefully who you ask to help you.

1. Do I trust this person?
2. Does this person know me well enough to answer the questions effectively?

Finally, a word of caution. Throughout this exercise, guard against condemnation. Yes, the purpose is to inspire love for God by surfacing hypocrisy and disobedience. But the purpose of surfacing this hypocrisy is not self-loathing, but freedom.

Conviction brings freedom and is from God; condemnation brings oppression and is from the enemy. While both conviction and condemnation are deeply penetrating and often painful, only conviction is accompanied by a sense of hope and promise for the future. Scripture reminds us that there is "*no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1).

God brings conviction because He is kind (Rom. 2:4) and wants us to be free from shame and guilt. The enemy brings condemnation because he wants us to keep us under the control of shame and guilt. As you engage this exercise, be careful to stay open to hopeful conviction while guarding against despairing condemnation.

STEP 1: WRITE A PRAYER

Use this page to write a prayer to God. Ask God to give you eyes that see what He wants you to see and ears that hear what He wants you to hear. Ask for a humble and open heart. Ask that you hear His voice of conviction and not the accuser's voice of condemnation.

STEP 2: ASK GOD

Ask God the following two questions and record any response you hear in the space provided.

Legalism: Do I carry the name of Christ while inwardly still trusting in myself or something other than You?

License: Do I use grace as a license to sin?

Ask God: What are current areas of disobedience or hypocrisy in my life?

STEP 3: ASK OTHERS

Ask one or two trusted friends the same questions and record their responses in the space provided.

Legalism: Do you sense that I carry the name of Christ outwardly while inwardly still trusting in myself or something other than God?

License: Do you see areas of my life where I use grace as a license to sin?

Ask your friend: What are current areas of disobedience or hypocrisy you see in my life?

STEP 4: FINAL THOUGHTS

The great irony and tragedy of hypocrisy is that we discover it and then attempt to beat it in our own strength. Use this space to entrust yourself to God. If you have uncovered hypocrisy or disobedience through this exercise, bring it before God, ask Him for His grace, and ask Him for His power to overcome. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is available to raise us up and out of our sin. *“Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”* (Romans 6:4b).

Notes: