



“Partial Obedience’s Disclosure of the Heart”
Judges 2:1-5; 1:8-36

Idea: Partial obedience reveals a heart that is disobedient.

Intro: A student at Cambridge University entered the classroom on exam day and asked the proctor to bring him cakes and ale. The proctor refused, expressing astonishment at the young student’s audacity. At this point the student read from the four-hundred-year-old Laws of Cambridge, which were written in Latin and still nominally in effect. The passage read by the student said, “Gentlemen sitting for examinations may request and require Cakes and Ale.” The proctor was forced to comply. Pepsi and hamburgers were judged the modern equivalent, so the necessary accommodations were made for the student. After all, the law was on his side. Three weeks later the student was summoned to the office of Academic Affairs to face disciplinary action and was assessed a fine of five pounds. He was not fined for demanding cakes and ale, but for blatantly disregarding another obscure Cambridge law: he had failed to wear a sword to the examination.

It is important to keep the whole law. This humorous story of a sassy college student underscores a truth we tend to forget: partial obedience is not obedience.

Inquiry: We see this reality lived out by the people of Israel throughout the book of Judges. As we have already stated, the theme of Judges is the Canaanization of Israel. God's people had entered and began the conquest of the Promise Land under the leadership of Joshua. They had won decisive victories against the people of Jericho, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. The inhabitants of the land, however, were not fully destroyed. After Joshua's death the people of Israel became content to settle down amongst the Canaanites and lost the incentive to possess the whole land. They intermarried with the pagan peoples, which resulted in their worship of Yahweh being syncretized with the worship of Baal.

Chapter 1 is pervaded by unfulfilled commitment, incomplete obedience, and compromising tolerance. Even when the Israelites gain the upper hand over the Canaanites, they refuse to carry out Yahweh's agenda. Instead of reshaping the world after the image of Yahweh's will, they live in and with the world, and before long they have taken on the characteristics of the world. Instead of making this the land of the people of God, they become like the people of the land.

We have already witnessed the subtle infiltration of partial obedience through Judah's treatment of Adoni-bezek (1:6). This trend continues as Judah failed to drive out the inhabitants of the plain (1:19). Likewise, Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem. Then Joseph allowed a man from Luz (Bethel) to live after he showed them the way into the city. That man went to the land of the Hittites and built a new Luz (1:26). Thus, the pagan, influential culture of Canaan was allowed to continue. The city of was not conquered; it was simply transferred to a new site and functioned as a sanctioned symbol of "the Canaanite in their midst."

The story of this man from Luz in many ways is similar to Rahab from Jericho. Both individuals helped the Jews, which eventually led to the defeat their own people. The major difference, however, is that Rahab put her faith in the God of Israel (Joshua 2:11; Heb 11:3), and the man from Luz did not.

The partial obedience increased in Israel. Manasseh did not drive out those in their region. Ephraim did not drive out those in Gezer. Zebulun did not drive out those in Kitron and Nahalol. Asher did not drive out the Canaanites in their region either. In fact the text says that the Asherites lived among the Canaanites (1:32). Naphtali failed to drive out Canaanites from their region. And the Amorites pushed Dan back up into the hill country and wouldn't allow them to come down.

And so we come to chapter 2 in the book of Judges. Chapters 1 and 2 are two sides of one coin, whereby we see both a report and an interpretation of what has happened. Wedged between these two historical reports is an encounter with a divine messenger.

Read Judges 2:1-5.

This is the first of three progressive confrontations between Yahweh and Israel in Judges. Here in chapter 2 God speaks through an envoy. In 6:7-10, He speaks through a prophet. And in 10:10-16, Yahweh himself speaks. What a terrible set of confrontations these are for Israel as the Lord reminds them of their rebellion and idolatry. At the same time, they are a beautiful picture of God's grace. Each time God reminded Israel of His continued faithfulness (2:1), pointed out their sin (2:2, and gave room for repentance (2:4-5).

God's present displeasure with Israel is cast against the backdrop of His gracious actions on the nation's behalf in the past. There was no reason for Israel to chase after idols. God had proven Himself over and over again to be the One True Living God. He had been amazingly gracious toward Israel. He had kept His covenant with Israel, but the people had not

(2:2). They were not to make a covenant with any of the nations. They were to annihilate them and destroy their places and forms of worship. Israel failed to do that. It started when the Gibeonites deceived Joshua into making a treaty with them (Joshua 9). It continued as Adoni-bezek was taken to Jerusalem rather than being killed. It continued as the man from Luz was allowed to go free only to establish a new Luz among the Hittites. It continued as the tribes of Israel one after another failed to conquer the land Joshua had given them.

Israel's partial obedience to God's command disclosed the reality of their hearts. The same is true of us today. When we only partially obey God it discloses much about the condition of our hearts.

Illust: In the 80s movie *Karate Kid*, young Daniel asks Mr. Miagi to teach him karate. Miagi agrees under one condition: Daniel must submit totally to his instruction and never question his methods. Daniel shows up the next day eager to learn. To his chagrin, Mr. Miagi has him paint a fence. Miagi demonstrates the precise motion for the job: up and down, up and down. Daniel takes days to finish the job. Next Miagi has him scrub the deck using a prescribed stroke. Again the job takes days. Daniel wonders, "What does this have to do with karate?" But he says nothing. Next, Miagi tells Daniel to wash and wax three weather-beaten cars and again prescribes the motion. Finally, Daniel reaches his limit: "I thought you were going to teach me karate, but all you have done is have me do your unwanted chores!" Daniel has broken Miagi's one condition, and the old man's face pulses with anger. "I have been teaching you karate! Defend yourself!" Miagi thrusts his arm at Daniel, who instinctively defends himself with an arm motion exactly like that used in one of his chores. Miagi unleashes a vicious kick, and again Daniel averts the blow with a motion used in his chores. After Daniel successfully defends himself from several more blows, Miagi simply walks away, leaving Daniel to discover what the master had known all along: skill comes from repeating the correct but seemingly mundane actions. Success comes from obediently and fully

following the directions of the master. Like many of us, Daniel didn't really believe that his master knew what was best. He second-guessed him. His partial obedience demonstrated much about his heart.

Allow me to share with you five realities from the text, regarding partial obedience's disclosure of the heart.

1. Obedience is rooted in one's faith in God.

In Genesis 15 God revealed to Abraham what his future would look like. At the time, he and Sarah had no children of their own, but the Lord told Abraham that he would have an heir and become the father of innumerable peoples. Abraham believed the Lord and acted in faith.

Jesus said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* (John 14:15)

Faith, love, and obedience work together in the life of the Christ-follower. You will obey God only if you trust Him because obedience always begins and ends with trust.

God has declared in His Word the parameters for satisfaction. For example financial satisfaction is found in one's contentment with what he or she has. *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs* (1 Tim 6:10). Paul warns against loving or prizing financial gain. Similarly, sexual satisfaction is found in being content with the partner the Lord has given you. *Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth* (Prov 5:18). Solomon warns against the danger of seeking sexual satisfaction outside of the marital relationship. Ultimately, both Solomon and Paul are declaring that satisfaction is found only in God and

doing things God's way. And you will only do things God's way when you trust Him.

Illust: If you are a parent today, then you understand this principle. We have all warned our children about certain dangers. We've told them that they shouldn't try to climb up the front of the oven because they could get hurt. What happens? The door opens and slams them to the ground. We've told them to not touch the top of the stove because it's hot. What happened? They touched it and got burned. We've told them to not stand close to the edge of the bed. What happened? They fell off and busted their head.

Appl: Sure these are things that kids have to learn, but they could save themselves some pain if they would just believe mom and dad. You see, obedience is rooted in one's faith. The reason our kids touched the stove and got burned is because they really didn't believe that it would hurt them. And the reason you don't fully obey God is because you don't fully believe Him.

2. Disobedience indicates a lack of trust in God.

The Bible tells us that God told Abraham to leave his home and go to a place that the Lord had not yet revealed. In essence he was told to get up and go...instructions would come along the way (Gen 12:1, 4). There was no hesitation in Abraham's obedience because He believed God (Gen 15:6).

The reason you and I disobey or even partly obey is because we don't believe God. We think that we know better or that we can improve upon what the Lord has declared.

- You don't share the gospel with others because you don't believe the Holy Spirit will use you to

bring someone to faith in Christ, or you don't believe the gospel is powerful enough to change the other person's life.

- You don't tithe and give to the Lord's church because you don't believe God can meet your financial needs and take care of your family.
- You don't incorporate God's Word into your business and family practices because you don't believe it is relevant.

Your partial obedience and disobedience indicates that you really don't believe God. This was Israel's problem. They didn't believe that God would help them drive out all the peoples in the land.

3. Obedience to God ensures the blessing of God.

One truth that for some reason we tend to forget is that God wants to bless His children. He is a loving Father, and a loving father delights in blessing his children. He has promised to bless us, but He can't bless us when we are not walking by faith and acting in obedience to Him. God had told Israel that He would go before them and drive out the nations. All they had to do was trust Him. He was the one who defeated Pharaoh. He was the one who knocked down the walls of Jericho. He was the one who had been with and provided for them every step of the way.

Appl: Like Israel, God desires to bless you. He delights in lavishing His goodness upon you. So what are His blessings?

- His presence
- His Word
- His provision

Read John 14:12-14.

4. Disobedience to God ensures the discipline of God.

No good father rewards his children for disobedience. No good father rewards his children for putting themselves in great danger. A good father disciplines his children when they disobey.

Discipline teaches you that a line has been crossed...a transgression has been made. Discipline reminds you that there is a standard to keep. It also teaches that God loves you.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. – Hebrews 12:6

God did not discipline Israel because He was an old, angry, and punitive Father looking for an opportunity to beat someone over the head. No, He disciplined Israel so that they would learn that what they were doing was destructive and dangerous. He disciplined them so that they would learn to trust Him and therefore be blessed.

5. Despite one's disobedience, God remains faithful.

God had made a covenant with Abraham and Moses. He had pledged His faithfulness to them, and He had remained faithful to them every step of the way (Judges 2:1). When Manasseh was unable to defeat the people in Beth-shean and Taanach, it wasn't because God failed them. When Ephraim failed to conquer Gezer, it wasn't God's fault. When Asher was reduced to living among the Canaanites and when Dan was pushed back up into the hill country, it wasn't because God had left His people. These shortcomings happened because Israel refused to be faithful and obedient to God's Word.

When you and I don't see and experience the blessing and provisional hand of God upon our lives and

families, it is not because God has failed or left. It is because we have chosen not to believe and obey God's Word.

Yet despite our disobedience God always remains faithful. The Bible reminds us that God will never leave or forsake us. He disciplines yes, but only because He is a loving Father who desires to teach us right from wrong.

Conclusion: When we disobey or even partially obey the Lord, it reveals much about the condition of our hearts. It reveals that there is a lack of faith. It might be a deficiency, or it might be the absence of faith.

“For the heart to obey Christ, the heart must be in Christ.”
– F.B. Meyer

For those who are beginning to realize that you're life is being lived in rebellion to God, the first question you need to answer is, “am I in relationship with Jesus?”

For those in Christ but are struggling to believe and obey God consistently. You need to realize that the Christian life is not all about an emotional high.

“Loving the Lord is not an emotional goosebump; it is a commitment to selfless obedience.” – John MacArthur

“A religious revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God.” – Charles Finney

Like Abraham, we simply must believe God and follow where He leads. In that simple obedience our heart discloses our faith in and love for God.