



“Active Obedience”
Luke 8:19-21

Idea: Active obedience involves hearing and doing the Word of God.

Intro: Samuel Langhorne Clemens was an American writer, humorist, entrepreneur, publisher, and lecturer. You probably know him better by his pen name, Mark Twain. He wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain was born and raised on the banks of the Mississippi River in Hannibal, Missouri. During his adult life, Twain was quite the adventurer. On one of his trips, he encountered a ruthless businessman from Boston who boasted that nobody ever got in his way once he determined to do something. The man said, “Before I die, I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I’m gonna climb Mount Sinai. And when I’m up there I’m gonna read the Ten Commandments aloud at the top of my voice!” Unimpressed, Twain responded, “I got a better idea. Stay in Boston, and keep’em.”

Twain was known for his wit and humor. His response to the loud and arrogant businessman, while funny, highlights for us the importance of obedience. Whereas it is good to say and hear the Word of God, the emphasis in Scripture is always laid upon doing the Word of God. I doubt very much that the Lord would be impressed with any of us climbing to the top of Mt. Sinai, where the Law was given to Moses, and reading the Ten Commandments out loud. No, He would rather you quietly and determinatively live in obedience to them right where you are today.

Obedience, like much of the Christian life, is a conscious decision that one makes. The believer will never fall into obedience to God’s Word. It is quite the opposite. The reason for this is because the default position of all human beings is disobedience to God due to the sinful nature that all possess. And while this is true, the command from God is to obey in all things. It has been this way from the very beginning, yet He does not force us to believe and obey. Instead, the Lord allows humanity to choose whether or not to obey. It would be much simpler and safe if He would force us to obey. The choice He allows us to make on every decision is dangerous because the natural, gravitational pull is always away from God. For this reason, believers need to be vigilant and active in their obedience to Christ. Jesus addresses active obedience in the next set of verses that we come to in Luke’s gospel.

Read Luke 8:19-21.

Inquiry: These verses are some of the most difficult ones in this gospel to understand. This is largely because Jesus’ words shock us. It is hard to understand how anyone, upon hearing that their family is asking for them, would not immediately go out to meet them. Jesus, however, does not budge. His response almost sounds dismissive of his mother and family.

Luke offers no context to his readers as to why Mary and Jesus' siblings came to visit like the other writers did. In fact, Luke's account of this event is the shortest of all the gospels. Matthew most likely placed it in the proper chronological position (Matt 12:46-50). Mark, while relatively chronological in the way he laid out the events in his gospel, associates the account with the Beelzebul charge and the agitation Jesus' family felt because of His actions (Mark 3:21-35).

Now, before anyone equates Jesus' statement about who His family is to how His family responded to His teaching and actions, it is important that we understand that the remark was not a repudiation of family. Jesus was not breaking the fifth commandment. The remark was instead an endorsement and an exhortation to disciples to be receptive to His Word. It makes a rhetorical contrast. Jesus' family are those who receive God's Word. This reception is more than just a simple hearing of the Word. It involves the doing the Word that has been heard. It is a call for active obedience. This combination of hearing and doing has already been expressed and illustrated by Jesus in Luke's gospel (6:47, 49). Those, then, who only hear but do not do are not part of Jesus' family.

Jesus' statement makes it clear that reception of God's Word is never confined or limited to mere intellectual recognition and agreement. Jesus does not call His disciples to nod their heads in agreement and amen everything He says without any plans to implement them into action. No, His statement makes it clear that reception expresses itself in action. Darrell Bock, in his commentary on Luke, says, "Jesus does not want scribes, but servants."

I find this whole scenario fascinating. Luke tells us that Jesus is told that His mother and brothers are outside and asking for Him. Jesus responds by stating that His mother and brothers "*are those who hear the word of God and do it.*" James, the author of the short, five-chapter epistle in our New Testaments, was the half-brother of Jesus. He is known in church history as James the Just. As best we know, James and his siblings did not come to faith in Jesus until after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:7). Now, there is no way to definitively know that James was there with his other siblings and Mary on this particular day, but it is probably safe to think he was. If so, then it means that the messenger came back to Mary, James, and the others saying, "Jesus is not coming. In fact, He sounded very dismissive of you. He stated that His mother and brothers are those who hear and do the Word of God." Now, I have to believe that Jesus' words were a slap in James' face. They were offensive to him, but Mary probably treasured them in her heart (Luke 2:19). After seeing Jesus resurrected, James' eyes were opened to the gospel, and he believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior. James became the pastor of the Jerusalem church. He was also known as "Camel Knees" because of his prayer life. In James' epistle, he calls for believers to both hear and to do the Word of God (James 1:22-25). Ol' Camel Knees could say this because he fully knew and understood what it meant to be in the family.

Those who would call themselves believers and followers of Jesus Christ should likewise exemplify active obedience in their Christian lives. They should actively be hearing and doing the Word of God. If one is not hearing and doing, can that person really call themselves a Christian and part of the family? Let's take a deeper look at active obedience.

1. Redefines one's loyalty.

Jesus said, "*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.*"

Our Lord makes clear that His loyalty was first and foremost with God and with those who hear and obey God. Family in the Jewish culture during the time of the Bible was incredibly important. Everything was tied to family.

Land allotments were tied to family. Under Joshua's leadership, sections of the Promise Land were allotted to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then smaller portions were given to families within each tribe.

The land was never meant to leave the family to which it was assigned. Even if the land were sold, it was to be returned at the year of jubilee (Lev 25).

Marriages were tied to family. Many times, the parents would arrange the marriages of their children. The bride moved in with her new husband in the home of his father. It was a patriarchal system with a strong sense of loyalty on family.

Therefore, when we read that Jesus' mother and brothers came to see Him, it is shocking that He did not immediately move to see them. His response, however, shows us that when believers are actively walking in obedience with God it redefines their loyalties. For Jesus, His preeminent loyalty was not to His blood kin. Instead, His loyalty was to the Father and to those who also were hearing and doing the Word of God. And the same is true of believers. Active obedience to the Word of the God actually creates in the life of a Christian a higher loyalty than his or her closest earthly relationship.

Again, Jesus is not repudiating His earthly family. In this moment, He is declaring that His relationship and walk with His Heavenly Father is more important than that of His earthly mother. In doing so, He is also endorsing and exhorting other believers to allow the loyalties of their lives to be redefined by active obedience.

Is your chief loyalty toward God and His Word? Active obedience redefines one's loyalty.

2. Recognizes a shared commonality.

Jesus said, "*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.*"

As Jesus points out that there is a greater Father to whom we owe the highest loyalty, this redefining of our loyalties binds us together with others who also have had their loyalties redefined by active obedience. The church is a beautiful melting pot of people from all walks of life. In the church we find all ethnicities, all languages, all educational levels, all economic levels, old and young, male and female, king and peasant, and anything else that would be a divider. How can such a diverse group ever find and develop any sense of unity? It comes from one commonality, belief in and obedience to the Lord.

You see, when you as a follower of Jesus Christ are walking in active obedience to the Lord, you are attracted to others who are doing the same. You are traveling down the path of intimacy and power with Jesus, and you do not want to leave it. So, you want to travel with others on the same path. You have no desire to veer from this path.

This reason is why we see strong churches and weak churches. Churches that are strong are full of members who love God and desire to hear and obey. They are reading and hearing the Word. They are heeding the Word in the lives and putting it to work. Churches that are weak are full of members who love themselves and the things of this world. Their loyalty lies there rather than with God. They are not hearing and heeding the Word. Many times, they have replaced it with something else.

What is your shared commonality with other believers?
Active obedience recognizes a shared commonality.

3. Refines the concept of family.

Jesus said, "*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.*"

The Word of God forges new bonds and affections that our natural families point to and symbolize. This bond is directly related to the common loyalty shared among members of the local church. I heard

about a young Christian couple with young children who lived a few hundred miles from their families. They had moved away after college for work. Their careers were flourishing. God had blessed them with great jobs, but He also had led them to a wonderful, gospel centered Church. They plugged in and were growing deep in their faith. As they did so, they obviously became more and more involved in their church. In many ways, this kept them from going back to their hometown as often as they used to do. Well, their parents wanted them to come home more often, especially for Christmas. They agreed to do so for a few years, but eventually, they decided to start staying home. It was a hard decision but leaving for Christmas meant that they could not participate and celebrate the Lord's birth with their church family. One day, one of the mothers said, "You guys love your church friends more than you do your own family." As you can imagine, this allegation was shocking. It was not true, but this parent misunderstood their reasoning. It was not that they did not love their families. It was that in Christ; they now had a new family with whom they wanted to live out the Bible's commands.

As believers who seek to actively obey God's Word, we will supernaturally gravitate toward others like-minded brothers and sisters who are committed to hearing and doing God's Word. The Word of God forges new bonds and affections that our natural families point to and symbolize. You know God's Word is doing its work in your heart when you share a stronger bond with your brothers and sisters in the church who are actively obeying God than your blood relatives who do not believe or obey.

Has God's Word refined your concept of family?

Conclusion: Jesus's mother and His siblings were trying to understand Jesus's actions. He was unconventional. As such, His teaching and behaviors were causing quite a stir among the people of Israel. He shined the spotlight on religious, passive hypocrisy and called for relational, active obedience, saying "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*" (John 14:15).

Active obedience is what Mark Twain called for from the Boston businessman. Active obedience is what we need today in the church. It is much easier, however, to appear religious. It is much easier to climb to the top of Mt. Sinai and scream out the Ten Commandments. Perhaps, some would prefer it. In doing so, some people might even consider your actions to be pious and inspiring.

How would Jesus regard your actions? His statement in these verses makes it clear that reception of God's Word is never confined or limited to mere intellectual recognition and agreement. Jesus does not call His disciples to nod their heads in agreement and amen everything He says without any plans to implement them into action. No, His statement makes it clear that reception expresses itself in action. Jesus does not want scribes; He wants servants.

Are you actively obeying Jesus and His Word? Do you only hear without obedience, or are you hearing and doing the Word? If so, what difference is it making in your life? Has it redefined your loyalties? Have you recognized this shared commonality with other believers? Has your concept of family, then, been refined?

Maybe today, your first step of obedience is believing the gospel message and trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior. If so, I have news for you.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?