



The 'Obedience' of the Gospel

By

Mark McGee

So far in my 8th Season Podcast series I've shared thoughts with you about:

- 8 Rules for Bible Study
- 40 Rules for Ministry
- The Heart of the Gospel
- Defending and Confirming the Gospel
- Your Fellowship in the Gospel
- The Completion of the Gospel
- The Affection of the Gospel
- The Discernment of the Gospel
- The Excellence of the Gospel
- The Sincerity of the Gospel
- The Fruit of the Gospel
- The Advancement of the Gospel
- The Preaching of the Gospel
- Living for the Gospel
- Conduct Worthy of the Gospel

- Suffering for the Gospel
- The Joy of the Gospel
- The Humility of the Gospel
- The Sacrificial Mind of the Gospel
- The Gospel's Name Above Every Name
- The Glory and Honor of the Gospel
- The Power of the Gospel

The next aspect I'd like to share with you is the 'Obedience' of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12-13

The Holy Spirit continued to inspire the Apostle Paul as he wrote his letter to the Christians in Philippi. After making the remarkable claim that God the Father had ‘highly exalted’ God the Son (Jesus Christ) and ‘given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,’ it shouldn’t be surprising that the Spirit’s next point would be about Christians ‘obeying’ Jesus Christ.

Let's pause for a moment and remember something about the history of Philippi. I think that might help us understand why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul write these words. Philippi is located in north eastern Greece (Macedonia). The Thracians occupied the city (originally known as Crenides) as early as the 6th century BC. Philip II of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great) conquered the city in the 4th century and renamed it Philippi after himself. The city became a military stronghold.

Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius (the men who killed Julius Caesar) in Philippi. Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra a decade later and rebuilt Philippi. He decided to use the city for retired soldiers and gave it the highest privilege available to a city at the time (*ius italicum*). Philippi was an urban center, near Neapolis, when Paul visited there in about 49 AD. Even though Latin was the official language, most residents spoke Greek. The residents, many of them retired soldiers, were nationalistic in their politics.

The Christians in Philippi lived in a society that was mostly pagan, though there was a small Jewish community. It was too small to even have a synagogue (Acts 16:13). The citizens of Philippi worshipped Greek, Macedonian, and Roman gods (including the Emperor). Some people also worshipped gods from 'mystery cults' (Eastern and Egyptian). This means that Christians had a challenge as they shared their beliefs with neighbors, vendors, travelers, etc. That was because Christians believed that the Name of Jesus Christ was 'above every name.' Paul also taught the Christians that 'that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'

Those beliefs would have offended many pagans because Christians believed the Name of Jesus was greater than all their gods and greater than the Emperor. Christians also claimed that all the gods of Greece and Rome (and the Emperor) would one day bow the knee to Jesus Christ and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. That would have made believing and preaching the Gospel difficult – even dangerous. Remember that Paul was arrested in Philippi a decade earlier for daring to demonstrate the power of Jesus Christ over the gods of the pagans (Acts 16:16-24). Interestingly, that event was the beginning of what would become the 'church' in Philippi (Acts 16:25-40). The combination of Lydia the Jew and the 'keeper of the prison' and his family were that beginning. We never know what God has planned or how He will carry out His plans. That is why we must 'trust and obey.'

Paul called on the Philippians to be obedient to Christ, whether he (Paul) was with them or not. The Philippians loved Paul and looked to him as the one God had sent to tell them about Christ. Paul wrote them as a prisoner of Rome, which meant he could not be with them to encourage and strengthen them in person. That's why he wrote – 'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.' Paul knew what they were facing and wanted them to stand tall and strong in their belief in Jesus Christ – no matter what opposition they faced.

Christians have faced challenges from people who believe differently for two thousand years. We need to hear what Paul wrote to the Philippians. We need to obey our Lord. For those of us who live in a country that is predominantly Christian, or at least accepting of Christianity, we may find it difficult to imagine what the Philippians must have endured and why Paul wrote to them as he did. However, for those who live in countries where Christianity is not tolerated and Christians are tortured for not worshipping false gods, I pray Paul's

words to the Philippians are a comfort and encouragement to you.

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In Christ's Love and Grace,

Mark McGee

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