

PROGRAM 40 PAGE 1

WHERE “LOVE” IS SPELLED WITH NINE LETTERS (John 14:21)

Page 1 Love Equals Obedience—No “Me, Myself And I” Allowed

Then He said to *them* all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. Luke 9:23

It is easy to say, "I'll follow Christ." But when we learn the cost, many are not so sure they wish to make the journey. While salvation is free because Jesus paid the price, being His disciples is costly because it is we who must pay a price. What does it mean to deny myself and take up my cross daily - a cross that can only signify a daily inner death to self? And what does it mean to follow Christ? Where is He going? What will He be doing?

Let me tell you the story I read about a five-year-old boy who illustrates the above text. His sister had a rare disease and needed a blood transfusion from her brother who had survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies to combat that illness. When asked to give his blood to save his sister, the lad hesitated, took a deep breath and said, "Yes, I'll do it if it will save Liz." The account continues, "As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled, as we all did, seeing the color returning to her cheeks. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded." That's when he asked the doctor, "Will I start to die right away?" Being only five, the boy had misunderstood the request for blood. He thought he was going to have to give *all* of his blood! And he was willing!

Now look at our scripture again. Doesn't the One who gave all His blood deserve you and me as a living sacrifice? To say "No!" to self daily? To take up our personal crosses and follow the Savior by embracing all of His commands and fulfilling all of His demands? Anything less is not to be a disciple, but to be deceived!

My prayer: "Lord Jesus, You held back nothing in offering Yourself for me. I shall hold nothing back from You. Teach me to deny self and take up my cross of obedience to You - daily!"

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WHERE “LOVE” IS SPELLED WITH NINE LETTERS (John 14:21)

Page 2 Love Equals Obedience—No Retreating Allowed

“When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD;
And my prayer went *up* to You, Into Your holy temple.” Jonah 2:7

Liberal and lost theologians have long labeled the story of Jonah as symbolic or figurative. However, Jesus the Messiah attested to the literal Jonah by comparing Jonah's being swallowed by the great fish with our Savior's literal death, burial and subsequent resurrection. The reluctant "prophet of flight" leaves us a great warning and lesson. Never - ever - run from God's orders and will once He has made Himself clear to you. It's much easier to pay any price for going in the Father's direction than to run the other way (like Jonah who was called east to preach in Nineveh and sailed west to outrun God - Imagine!) The Lord who loves us is not in the habit of swallowing our excuses; rather He knows how to allow us to be swallowed up in a whale of a lot of trouble until, like Jonah, we come to our spiritual senses.

But, trust me, today's scripture is not only for those who run in flight from God's will in order to do their own, but also to us who have entered the good fight for the Lord. There will be many battles, terrible tests and excruciating temptations that appeal to self. You may be there right now! Perhaps depression and discouragement threaten to drown you.

Remember Jonah! He could have given up, but then the fish would have never vomited up. He could have been food for the great fish or God's fisher of men to provide food for the lost of Nineveh.

What did he do when his very soul was fainting? "I remembered the Lord" are more than four nice words. They are the door to your deliverance from the greatest attacks you will ever face. Remember that you are not locked in the deep - alone. Jesus is there with you - waiting for you to acknowledge His presence and to cry out to Him in prayer. Jonah thought he was at the bottom of the ocean. But God already had the fish within range of the safe shore. All He had to hear was Jonah's

declaration of faith and trust: "Salvation is of the Lord" (2:9) and out came Jonah -
wiser for the wear. So shall it be with you!

My prayer: "May I never say 'no' to You, dear Lord, when You ask me to do anything. But
when warfare is most intense and my despair at its greatest, make me remember Your
nearness and pray - rather than give up and run away."

**WHERE "LOVE" IS SPELLED WITH NINE LETTERS
(John 14:21)**

Page 3 Love Equals Obedience—No Excuses Allowed

"Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak." Jeremiah 1:7

A son has just made the mistake so many young people make with their fathers - that of believing their parents' wisdom is not sufficient and must be challenged. However, this time the son is Jeremiah and the Father is the Almighty God! Jeremiah's complaint is that he is too young to be responsible to God's calling him to be a prophet. "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." (v 6) That's when the Lord delivers the above word - both a rebuke and a command. No more excuses allowed. Jeremiah will go where God orders and speak what God tells him.

I see at least two meanings to the excuse of "I am a child". First, it is easy to write off the young as those God can't or won't use. The opposite is true. Look at the long trail of those called of the Lord in the flower of youth and observe their exploits. Joseph and Daniel. Joshua and David. The three Hebrew warriors who chose the fire rather than compromise. And don't forget Timothy who received the torch from Paul. Pray that God will call more young people to the front lines of battle, and encourage them through your example.

Second, it is easy for new Christians of any age to still feel "too young in the faith" to be of great use to the Lord. Yet it is in the very bloom of "first love for Jesus" where we hear God most clearly and wish to follow Him most closely. So no more excuses from you or me. And don't accept any excuses from others who sense God's call on their lives. Remind them of Jeremiah and that once the Lord speaks, whether we are 16 or 61, the only answer He expects is, "Yes, Lord!"

My prayer: "Father, I pray that You will give a vision to the Christian youth of America. Challenge them not to follow only safe and marked trails but to blaze new trails for You."

PROGRAM 40 PAGE 4

WHERE "LOVE" IS SPELLED WITH NINE LETTERS (John 14:21)

Page 4 Love Equals Obedience—No Substitutes Allowed

"Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams." 1 Samuel 15:22

We must take one more lesson from tragic King Saul. He had broken the heart of God by refusing to obey specific orders. Now he reasons that his very disobedience has worked to provide him with more offerings to God - akin to a bank robber who insists that he can give more to help orphans. It doesn't work with Samuel, who reminds Saul that obedience beats sacrifice and rebellion equals witchcraft. (v 23)

Webster describes "rebellious" as "resisting authority...defiant." That immediately brings to our minds children rebelling against parents, criminals rebelling against society, and other human examples. But what about you and me when it comes to our Father in heaven? Do I rebel against His authority? It's easy to give a quick "no" if we're not a thief, murderer or adulterer. However, the Holy Spirit convicts an honest heart far beyond the moral or immoral externals. God commands me to be a student of Scripture. Am I? He orders us to take the gospel to every creature. Do we? He commands me to love my Christian brother, my neighbor and even my enemy. Do I?

Too many Christians view the Old Testament as "mean law" and the New Testament as "sweet grace." But just study all the commands we are given in the New Testament and it may shock and sadden you as to how easy it is to offer as a substitute our perceived "sacrifices for God" rather than saturate ourselves on Scripture so that we can know the heart of the Lord and measure our love by obedience to His Word.

My prayer: "Heavenly Father, if even earthly fathers long for obedience from their children rather than excuses, how much more do You deserve my obedience to Your Word. Show me any areas of rebellion in my own life and give me a heart that obeys."

PROGRAM 40 PAGE 5

WHERE "LOVE" IS SPELLED WITH NINE LETTERS (John 14:21)

Page 5 Love Equals Obedience—In Spite of the Cost

But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29

The news of Jesus' resurrection was explosive! Some Jewish leaders tried to keep it quiet by saying the body had been stolen (but no search was made for the "thieves"!). Other Jews were flooded with such overwhelming joy and power from the now forever-alive Messiah that they were like erupting volcanoes that could not be quieted. They had been warned not to speak of Jesus, but "you have flooded Jerusalem with your doctrine" (v 28 Amplified). That's when Peter declared that when man's laws conflict with God's laws, God must be obeyed. Their courage earned them a beating (v 40) which they accepted as a badge of honor "that they were being counted worthy - dignified by the indignity - to suffer shame" for Jesus (v 41 Amplified).

God is preparing you and me for great tests just around the corner. What do you do if (when!) laws are made that no one teaches there is only "one way" in religion? No one speaks to others about Christ? No one disputes evolution as the new "law of faith" or argues that sexual deviation from Bible norms (homosexuality, sex with children, bestiality) is wrong? That "the law" of eradicating the unborn, deformed or elderly must not be challenged? Much of the above was faced by Christians under Nazism and Communism. It will all be faced before evil is silenced forever by the return of the Lord.

Let the Holy Spirit lay a solid foundation of biblical convictions under you that won't crack when the tests come. Laws that do not conflict with God's established moral laws are to always be obeyed (including speed laws and paying taxes!) But any law that says "Away with Jesus!" and that seeks to teach evil as good must always be met with "We must obey God rather than men."

My prayer: "Father, I know that thousands of future martyrs are already living this truth. Get me ready - make me faithful - no matter what tests are coming!"

