

The God Who Is Near (Part 4 of 6)

If You Build It, He will Come: Connecting Obedience and the Presence of God

Exodus 35:30-39:43

Mark Vroegop

"Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did. Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins, and the veil of the screen; the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat; the table with all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; the lampstand of pure gold and its lamps with the lamps set and all its utensils, and the oil for the light; the golden altar, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance of the tent; the bronze altar, and its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the basin and its stand; the hangings of the court, its pillars, and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords, and its pegs; and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting; the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons for their service as priests. According to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them." (Exodus 39:32-43, ESV)

If you grew up going to church and children's Sunday School, there were often a number of songs that I am sure are still stuck somewhere in your brain. If Sunday School was not your experience growing up, you can probably imagine the kind of songs that were sung. They had a catchy tune, an easy-to-sing melody line, and usually a pretty solid message. The point of the song was to get a particular truth into the mind and heart of a child.

One of those classic songs talked about obedience and how it was the very best way to show that you believe. I thought about singing it for you this morning, but I think it would be better to have it sung by some more qualified kids: Paris and BJ.¹

Now, beyond how cute these two are, the message in the song is very relevant to where we are in Exodus 36-39.

*Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.
Doing exactly what the Lord commands; doing it happily.
Action is the key; do it immediately and joy you will receive.
Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe*

¹ Video can be found at: http://youtu.be/MI_USwrnEX0

After the major failure of the golden calf in Exodus 32, God gives the people a second chance in Exodus 34, and the covenant is validated by the glow on Moses' face. Clearly he had been in the presence of God. Then God gives them two very specific commands regarding Sabbath rest and generosity, both of which communicate something important about whether or not they "get it" as the people of God.

Beginning in 35:30 and through 39:43, we read about the actual construction of the Tabernacle, and what emerges from this lengthy account is a clear picture of the people's obedience. Moses had told the people exactly what the Tabernacle was to look like in chapters 25-31, and then they disobeyed terribly. They blew it, and now the question was whether or not the people were serious about their new relationship with God. How would they know? How would God know?

Obedience – it's the very best way to show that you believe.

The obedience of Israel in constructing the Tabernacle showed that they believed. Do you know that this formula – the connection between belief and obedience – is still a central part of the message of the Bible? Israel showed that they believed through their obedience, and you show that you believe through obedience.

Let me show you this in two ways. First, let's see the thread of obedience in Exodus 36-39 so we can learn about the essentials of obedience. Second, let's make the connection in the New Testament and learn why obedience is essential.

What are the essentials of obedience?

When I began to outline the book of Exodus, this section really intrigued and frustrated me. The reason that it created those paradoxical emotions is because the content of these chapters is basically a repetition of what we studied previously. As I read through it and compared it with chapters 25-31, it was strange to me that God simply tells them what to do, and then the people do it. There really is nothing new to the story. But then it dawned on me that if the major problem that Moses encountered at the base of the mountain was unbelieving disobedience, then it would make sense that these chapters would feature believing obedience. The point, then, is not just *what* they did but the fact that they *did it at all!*

Therefore, these chapters are not really about the construction of the Tabernacle. They are about Israel's complete obedience after their complete failure. So what did their obedience look like? Let me give you five essentials:

1. It is empowered

Hopefully you will remember that this book is not about Israel, Moses, Egypt, or Pharaoh. It is about God. Well, we see this theme emerge even in the obedience of the people. They are going to build the Tabernacle, but God is going to empower their building. He is the one who is going to give them the skill and the ability to obey.

This centers around two men: Bezalel and Oholiab. We see the following description of them and their work:

"Then Moses said to the people of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer. "Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the LORD has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded."'" (Exodus 35:30–36:1, ESV)

Do not miss the fact that 1) these men were called by God, 2) filled with the Spirit, and 3) there was a direct connection between God's gifting and their actions. Notice especially verse 35 – *"He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work..."* They were working, but their actions were not independent. Underneath their obedience was God's empowerment. Their obedience would have never been possible unless God had rescued them and empowered them.

One of my favorite verses in the New Testament that highlights the divine empowerment of obedience is Philippians 2:12-13. Paul commands obedience but assures them that God is the one who will help them.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but 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 work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12–13, ESV)

We obey. And God empowers our obedience.

2. It is enthusiastic

You might be tempted to think that God's empowerment negates or diminishes the people's response – as if they are "robots." But that would miss both the beauty of the empowerment and what actually happened.

Instead, notice what we see in Exodus 36:2 – *"And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work."* (Exodus 36:2, ESV) Don't miss the fact that God's empowerment and their enthusiasm went hand-in-hand. Their hearts were stirred to do the work. They were enthusiastic about their obedience.

This extended to more than just the artisans. We learned in 36:3 that the people kept bringing offerings for the Tabernacle and eventually Moses had to give an instruction that every ministry leader longs to say: "Stop giving!" (v 6). Their obedience was so enthusiastic that it was overwhelming.

3. It is tangible

So far we have talked about the emotional characteristics of obedience. But it is important to note that true obedience is not just something that happens in the heart; it is something that results in

tangible actions. Obedience involves activity. It is not theoretical. Obedience, while involving the heart, is something that must be done. Or as Paris and BJ reminded us: “Action is the key...do it immediately.”

The tangible action of Israel was connected to the physical construction of the Tabernacle. God had given them very specific instructions, and their obedience would be directly connected to their attention to doing it “as the Lord had commanded” (36:43).

What follows in the text is a listing of all the elements for the Tabernacle. Let’s get an overview:

- 36:8-15 – the Tabernacle structure and its coverings
- 37:1-9 – the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat
- 37:10-29 – the Table of Showbread, the Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense
- 38:1-8 – the altar of burnt offering and the bronze basin
- 38:9-19 – the exterior courtyard with its structures and curtains
- 39:1-31 – the priestly garments including the ephod, the breast piece, the robe, and the turban

Each of these elements had spiritual significance, and they were a vital part of the worship experience for the people of Israel. And each element was prescribed by God. God had told Moses exactly how the Tabernacle was to be constructed.

There was physicality to their obedience that was very important. They needed to have the right hearts but action was the key. . . doing exactly what the Lord commands. Obedience was tangible.

It is the same in the New Testament. Having a personal relationship with Christ not only means that you have been rescued from your sin through the gospel. It also means that there is a different conduct, different actions, and a different lifestyle. The gospel works!

“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7, ESV)

Make no mistake about it: true belief and obedience go together. If the people would not have obeyed, it would have been yet another example of their hard-hearted lack of belief. Their tangible obedience verified that their heart was in the right place.

I’m sure you have heard people say something like: “Well, what he did was wrong but his heart was in the right place.” Now I understand what people are saying in that. They want to give people the benefit of the doubt and that is commendable. However, that statement could imply that your actions really do not matter if you have the right heart. But the Bible tells us that actions come out of the heart (see Matt 15:19). In other words, actions really matter. So do not make the mistake of thinking that tangible actions of obedience or disobedience do not matter. Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe. If you believe then you will obey, specifically and tangibly.

4. It is complete

The story concludes with the Tabernacle elements being presented to Moses. He had given them instructions from the Lord, and they had obeyed completely. Notice how this theme of complete obedience appears in the text:

*"Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel **did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did.** Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; the covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins, and the veil of the screen; the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat; the table with all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; the lampstand of pure gold and its lamps with the lamps set and all its utensils, and the oil for the light; the golden altar, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance of the tent; the bronze altar, and its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the basin and its stand; the hangings of the court, its pillars, and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords, and its pegs; and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting; the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons for their service as priests. **According to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it...**" (Exodus 39:32–43, ESV)*

Now this should sound somewhat familiar because the people of Israel had told Moses in Exodus 19 that *"All that the Lord has spoken we will do"* (v 8). But then the golden calf happened. The beauty of this moment is the fact that they actually *did* what God commanded them to do. It is great to say that you will obey. But it is even better to actually obey.

Partial obedience is disheartening. As a child I never understood why my Dad would get discouraged when he would ask me if I had taken care of the hose, only to find it piled up like a ball of thread. But as a parent I understand. A bedroom that is fully picked up, a kitchen that is wiped absolutely clean, a car thoroughly vacuumed, and an extension cord neatly wound up – those actions feel like complete obedience as opposed to the bare minimum to "get by."

So are you and God on the same page when it comes to complete obedience? In the midst of one of our national scandals years ago, I remember hearing a public leader say that he had learned to cope with problems in life by compartmentalizing them. And I remember thinking – "Yep, that's the problem. You compartmentalize your morals." Obedience cannot be compartmentalized because we are dealing with God.

Oh, College Park, be careful here! God intends for obedience to be total, complete and thorough. In fact, the apostle Paul described genuine repentance this way in 2 Corinthians:

"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter." (2 Corinthians 7:10–11, ESV)

True obedience is always complete.

5. It is blessed

One of the first lessons we taught our little kids was “obedience brings blessing.” We wanted them to understand that doing what is right brings blessing, favor, and good results. We wanted them to see the connection between their actions and the results that came. Now I know that this is elementary because there are many times in “adult-life” where you do what is right and there is no visible blessing. But in the early days of a child’s life, this is an important concept to understand.

We see this elementary concept in Exodus 39 too. Verse 43 records that after Moses had observed the result of Israel’s labor, he was very pleased. They had followed God’s instructions, and the result was that the text said, *“Then Moses blessed them.”*

We do not know what this blessing entailed. But the most famous blessing in the Old Testament was first given around the construction of the Tabernacle and it sounded like this:

*“The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”*
(Numbers 6:24–26, ESV)

Moses was reflecting the pleasure of God in his blessing of the people. No doubt this must have been an amazing moment for him. He had delivered to the people very specific instructions from God. Now he was able to see with his own eyes, the beauty of the Lord’s instructions carried out by God’s people. What a difference this day was from what he saw when he came down the mountain! His dismay at the sight of the golden calf was eclipsed by the joy of their total obedience.

There is something profoundly joyful about knowing that people whom you love are doing what is right. No one wants to be the parent of a fool. No one enjoys watching a friend or a loved one’s life fall apart because of disobedience. 3 John 4 says this: *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”* (3 John 4, ESV)

So what are the essentials of obedience? We have seen five here. It was empowered, enthusiastic, tangible, complete, and blessed.

For Israel and for you, the very best way to show that you believe is by obedience. Now that may raise a bit of a problem because you may take a look at your life and realize there is no way that I really believe in Jesus given how I live. And if that is the case for you today, maybe you need to start with the need to receive Christ today and receive the empowerment for obedience that has always been elusive. There are no perfect Christians, that is for sure. But you cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus if obedience is not a real and tangible part of your life.

Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.

Why is obedience essential?

We have talked a lot about God's graciousness in the book of Exodus. We have observed God's gracious deliverance of the people from slavery, His tolerance of their complaining, and His choice to give the people a second chance. But it is important to note that there is another side to this coin. Obedience to God's command was and is very important.

I want to wrap up this section in Exodus by pulling back a bit further and looking at why obedience would be so essential. Why does obedience to God really matter?

This is not a theoretical question. It is practical for all of us because every time we are tempted, we are faced with the question of whether or not obedience is really essential.

1. It honors God as God

The Ten Commandments begin with these words: "I am the Lord your God..." (Ex 20:1). The reason God starts there is because the commands that follow are rooted to His place as God. In other words, God has the right to prescribe behavior and require obedience because He is God. Therefore, when we submit to His commands and obey, we are giving evidence that we understand who He is and who we are. Disobedience is a statement about what we think about God, His authority and our autonomy.

Paul, in Romans 1, says that disobedience serves to suppress the truth about God which is clearly seen in creation. What truth? Namely, that He is God and we are not. Obedience acknowledges that I am not the center of the universe.

2. It validates the gospel

I'm going to jump from the Old Testament to the New Testament with this point, although it is present in elementary form in the Old. The gospel is the simple message that we are saved by faith, not by our works. The beauty of the gospel is its grace – the way that God has treated us despite our obedience. But it does not stop there. St. Augustine said it like this: *"Faith alone saves but the kind of faith that saves is not alone."* Obedience verifies that true faith has come.

My favorite text that speaks to the double-sided nature of grace and obedience is Ephesians 2:8-10.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8–10, ESV)

The purpose of the gospel is to save us from our sins in the future and now. Obedience gives evidence that the gospel really works.

3. It gives assurance

If you grew up in church you probably heard the phrase "Once saved, always saved." While I agree with that statement, it was often used as basis for assurance of one's salvation. To get assurance a

person was told to look back to the date that he or she received Christ and to know the exact date that salvation came. That's a good start to assurance, but Peter tells us that ongoing obedience is also part of assurance. In other words, there is no better way to assure your heart that you are the "real deal" than by living it out through obedience.

"For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall." (2 Peter 1:9–10, ESV)

Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.

4. It is the best way to live

The final reason why obedience is essential is because God's ways work! Obedience to what God commands is the best way to live. If God is the creator of the world and if He has told us how to live, then living according to His commands is the best way to live. Through obedience God offers to us true life.

"They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life." (1 Timothy 6:18–19, ESV)

Obedience takes hold on that which is truly life! There is no better way to live than to be a grace-receiving, sin-killing, and obedience-embracing human being. God's commands are not designed to restrict our freedom but to maximize our happiness.

Obedience is essential and there are essentials to obedience. Israel's response to God's command gave evidence that their hearts were on fire for Him. It is the same for us today. Obedience shows that you believe.

Israel was making a sanctuary for worship, and their obedience was a vital part of this story. In the New Testament, God does not inhabit a physical sanctuary; He dwells inside people. And in doing so He makes them holy and empowers them to want more holiness.

So let me invite you to say to God:

*Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
Sanctuary for You*

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com