

# Obstacles To Obedience

**Introduction.** Albert Einstein didn't speak at all for the first three years of his life. But even though he received good grades throughout primary and elementary school, many of his teachers assumed he was lazy because he was always distracted by abstract concepts. Despite the lack of confidence that many adults showed towards Einstein, he rose above such negativity and became the most influential scientist of the twentieth century.

Vincent Van Gogh only sold one painting during his life. He produced over 900 paintings, yet only "Red Vineyard at Arles" was sold while he was alive. While he may not have physically overcome his challenges, his persistence and dedication to his work despite receiving no monetary compensation or external praise is something to be commended. His "Portrait of Dr. Paul Gachet" sold for \$83 million in 1990.

Stephen King's first novel, *Carrie*, was rejected by thirty different publishers. He was so upset that he threw the novel in the trash, until his wife later fished it out and encouraged him to finish it. King's books have now sold over 350 million copies, and *Carrie* has become a classic novel with many film and TV adaptations to its name. King's story shows that sometimes people just need a little bit of encouragement to overcome the obstacles in their lives.

The history of mankind is the history of overcoming obstacles. We'll all agree that there are obstacles to obeying the gospel, but when we're trying to convince someone to obey the gospel, and we're improperly diagnosing their resistance as disbelief, stubbornness, or carelessness, the reality is it's usually fear. The problem of fear is not from righteousness or truth, it's from Satan, who would much rather that you would never obey God. He tempts the hearts of men to take what seems to be the "easier way out".

Several years ago, in a teenage Bible class, a question was asked, "Why are you not a Christian?" In all, four answers were given, and we'll sort out the excuses, which are without justification (Luke 14:15-24) from the fear that lies behind them.

## ***I. "I Don't Know Enough"***

- A. When will someone have enough knowledge? This implies that one can't obey the gospel until everything's known. Thus, obedience is perceived as difficult, if not impossible in the mind of someone who says this.
- B. In a very positive fashion, Jesus said that enough truth can be known to set someone free (John 8:32). In the first century, disciples were converted after hearing the gospel once:
  1. The day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
  2. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8).
  3. Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16).
- C. If we have to wait until we have complete knowledge, then why does the New Testament encourage us to grow (Ephesians 2:21; 4:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18)?

- D. Only a modest amount of intelligence and corresponding knowledge is necessary. Someone has to know that they are in sin (Romans 7:9) and that Jesus is the way out of it and the way to God (John 8:24; 14:6).

## **II. "I Can't Live As A Christian"**

- A. This statement has serious implications because it's an indictment that God has commanded man to do the impossible. The gospel gives us the power to obey and be faithful (2 Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 3:20; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 Peter 1:5). God's commandments are given with the expectation that they be obeyed because they're not burdensome (1 John 5:3).
1. It's so hard to overcome and succeed when we begin in defeat. Satan wants to convince us that we like the way we are too much to change. He wants us to think that even if we try to change, we'll fail and go back.
    - a) Many times individuals will exaggerate others' perfection; they idealize others and never see themselves achieving the same level of success.
    - b) The reality is that some are more at ease with righteous living because they've been at it a while; they're "no longer children" (Ephesians 4:14) and they have their "senses exercised" (Hebrews 5:14). But they need forgiveness, just like you and me (Ephesians 2:1-13).
  2. Satan wants you to defeat yourself so that you'll never even begin to try. However, all of us, with determination, can achieve salvation (Mark 16:15-16).
    - a) There's no conclusion less truthful than the idea of not being able to do something that God expects. In Acts 17:30, God issued a command for "all men everywhere" to repent. By speaking this command, God has an expectation for "all men everywhere".
    - b) God's never wrong. If He expects that the ability to repent is within you, it must be. This certainly goes hand in hand with the Great Commission's call to preach the gospel to every creature (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). All who desire salvation are capable of achieving it, unless they don't try or give up.
- B. Notice the comments made by Paul in Colossians 1:25-29:
1. Paul was a minister of the word of God (v. 25).
  2. What was once unknown is now known or revealed (v. 26).
  3. The gospel Paul preached made the hearer complete or perfect (v. 28).
  4. Paul labored mightily for that end (v. 29).
- C. Was it all for nothing? Was it an exercise in futility or could it actually be done? Is the problem more of a matter of "won't" than it is "can't"?

## **III. "I'm Not Ready Yet"**

- A. When will you be ready? Lots of people live under the illusion they have unlimited time (Job 7:6; Psalm 90:10; Proverbs 27:1).
1. Everyone has 24 hours in a day and 168 hours in a week.
  2. This fact'll never change. Will we ever have more hours than this?
- B. Felix put off his obedience (Acts 24:22-26). Did he ever obey? Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian (Acts 26:28). Did he ever obey? The five

foolish virgins said, “We’ll get the oil later” (Matthew 25:1-13). They learned that you can wait too long.

1. This has been an easily-employed temptation of Satan for a long time. If Satan can get you to say these words, he knows that you’ll likely never find a convenient time to obey. A lot of people proclaim great plans for “someday”.
  2. You might think that you’ll wait until high school is over, college is over, marriage, the children are raised, and then retirement. But you may find that you’ve waited too long (Ecclesiastes 9:10). This life gets busy from the moment that we begin until the day we depart; and we must determine to make time, or time’ll never be found.
  3. There’s a time to obey. You obey when you’re cut to the heart by truth (Acts 2:36-39). You obey when you believe (Acts 16:30-34). You obey today (2 Corinthians 6:2). Your life has no guaranteed continuation, so don’t let an excuse today become your greatest regret in the eternal tomorrow.
- C. Fear is one of Satan’s tools (2 Timothy 1:7). Paul told Timothy that God didn’t give them a spirit of fear — God isn’t the source of this type of distracting fear.
- D. Fear holds many back from their necessary salvation on two fronts.
1. Reactions of family pose great fears.
    - a) Some are afraid of how their obedience will reflect on their loved ones (most often those who have already died, who didn’t obey “this way”).
    - b) Every person has their own opportunities. And we’ve got to act on our opportunities and do what’s right (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Timothy 2:15). Also, if they’re “lost” we definitely know they don’t want you to be lost with them (Luke 16:27-28).
  2. Reactions of friends pose great fears.
    - a) Friends can be the greatest support or the greatest weakness: Support when they help us achieve greater things (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10); weakness when they corrupt our good habits (Proverbs 14:12; 1 Corinthians 15:33).
    - b) Some hold back their obedience because their “friends” won’t support the personal improvement and they don’t want to endure their rejection. These “friends” will answer to God — do you want to answer to God with them (1 Peter 4:1-5)?
- E. Some just fear what they’ll have to give up. Many like their vices, but not one of those improves our lives — they’re detrimental (Galatians 5:19-21). Present priorities also hold many back (Matthew 6:25-33; Luke 14:15-20).

#### **IV. “I’m Too Busy”**

- A. Worldly interference can cause people to think they’re too busy. The same happened with the rich man (Luke 12:16-21). Jesus said that the cares of the world can choke the seed and it can become unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).
- B. In Luke 14:15-24, the people invited to the feast all gave excuses. They were “too busy” to partake in the wonderful bounty provided by the master. The master simply passed them by and told his servants to find others who’d come to the feast.
- C. Do you really think visiting Aunt Maude, fishing, gardening, streaming shows, playing ball, etc., is worthy of keeping you out of heaven? Some act as if they’ll

never have enough time to go to the cemetery (Ephesians 5:15-17). There's wisdom in Solomon's instructions (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

1. It's a known fact that 90% of conversions occur before 25 years old.
2. As they get older, people are less inclined to obey and walk by faith.

**Conclusion.** The preacher related that none of these young people, to the best of his knowledge, ever obeyed the gospel. One real and common problem is that once an excuse is put into use, it'll be used over and over again. While young people have been the examples used in this lesson, older people can and will use the same excuses. As far as the gospel is concerned, we can know enough (Mark 16:16); we can live it (Philippians 1:27); we have the opportunity (2 Corinthians 6:2); and, we have to make the time to obey and be faithful to God (Matthew 6:33).

The popular narrative of the western world over the last one hundred years or so has been that religion is "poison" as the famous atheist Christopher Hitchens used to argue. According to these voices, religion creates war and atrocity, judgmentalism and racism, intolerance and ignorance, across the populace. Images of people denying science, hating others, and doing violence against people, rule the day.

This is the assumed truth of our western story: Atheism, or at least agnosticism, produces a better, more progressive society. Religion produces a stunted or even backward trending society. Is this the case? Actual research done by sociologists shows that religion and Bible believers have a positive impact on society in a number of ways:

- They are the primary source of secular charitable funds that benefit victims of misfortune whatever their beliefs.
- They dominate the ranks of blood donors and other prosocial behaviors.
- They are much less likely to commit crimes.
- They are more likely to donate their money and time to socially beneficial programs and to be active in civic affairs.
- They enjoy superior mental health — are deemed happier and far less likely to commit suicide.
- They enjoy superior physical health — have an average life expectancy more than seven years longer than that of the irreligious.
- They are more apt to marry, less likely to divorce, and report higher degrees of satisfaction with their spouse.
- Religious husbands are far less likely to abuse their wives or children. This is of course contrary to the story that religions create systems of oppression in the home because of "male patriarchy".
- Religious fathers are more likely to be involved in youth-related activities such as coaching sports teams or leading Scout troops, etc.
- Religious students perform better on standardized achievement tests, are far less likely to drop out of school, obtain better jobs after graduation, and are far less likely to be on unemployment.
- In 247 studies done between 1944 and 2010, religion has a positive effect on society in regard to crime, deviance, and delinquency.
- Crime rates in the US compared to the decidedly less religious countries of Western Europe are glaringly less in many categories, with the exception of homicide rates: Denmark has nearly two-and-a-half times as many burglaries per

100,000 people, and is exceeded by Austria, Switzerland, the U.K., Sweden, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The same is true for theft, and assault rates.

- Urban stats going from present-day back to the 1920s shows that the higher a city's church membership rate, the lower its burglary, larceny, robbery, assault, and homicide rates.

So many people today want to argue that somehow religion is toxic to a culture. It's not. You can obey the gospel, spend eternity with the Lord, and help your earthly life and the earthly lives of others today as we give you the chance.