

# Lesson 11

## Obeying the Lord's Commands

### Leader Guide

Leader Guide Bible Studies

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**Lesson 11**  
**1 John 1:1-2:3**  
**Obeying the Lord's Commands**

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. *1 John 1:9*

**Prayers**

**Introduction**

Probably no aspect of our faith is more troubling to us than our obedience. The hope of abiding in Christ in perfect union as the vine and the branch is a bitter disappointment. When we focus on our sin, so great and monumental, it overshadows God's grace in our minds. But this is never the case. God's grace is always greater than our sin. We gladly receive Christ through grace without our merit, works, or obedience. Our faith and salvation through Christ are God's gifts of his abundant grace. Once we receive Christ and hear our Lord's command to obey his commands, we are tempted to set aside God's grace and think that salvation is about our work of obedience. We know the consequences of disobedience all too well: guilt, shame, brokenness in our relationships, secrecy to hide sins, deadening of our spiritual energy, and timid praise for Christ to others. We are tossed to and fro on a spiritual roller coaster and might even feel unsure of our salvation and unity in Christ.

We forget the depth of God's love for us, who made plans for us as his children from before creation, who sent his Son to die for our sins, who gave us faith so we might believe in Christ, our savior, and who has stored up good works for us to do in Christ's name. Nonetheless, we are called to obedience. Obedience is similar to good works. Both are important parts of our faith; salvation is not apart from them, but salvation is not found through them. Salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Obedience and good works flow from our devotion to Christ.

When the apostle John was an old man, he wrote to a generation of Christians who were too young to have met or seen Christ. John wrote to them about what it meant to be a Christian. He wanted them to be assured their faith was genuine and their salvation assured, so he devised several tests to illustrate genuine faith. John's first test of genuine faith and spiritual rebirth by the Holy Spirit was not to sin. John expressed our dual-minded nature about obedience and sin in the following way:

<sup>1Jn 2:1</sup> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense —Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

John's words might sound like a mixed message, but they accurately reflect our life experience. We know we should not sin, but we do. Therefore, Christ is our defender and is the one in whom we find complete forgiveness for our past, present, and future sins.

Read John's introduction to his letter focusing on his message not to sin.

## Read 1 John 1:5-2:3, Walking in the Light

<sup>1Jn 1:5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

<sup>1Jn 1:6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

<sup>1Jn 1:7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

<sup>1Jn 1:8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

<sup>1Jn 1:9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

<sup>1Jn 1:10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. <sup>w</sup>

<sup>1Jn 2:1</sup> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

<sup>1Jn 2:2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

<sup>1Jn 2:3</sup> We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

## Discuss

1. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus told his followers to be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Do you think it is possible not to sin (verse 2:1)?

**Temptation and sin are part of the Christian experience. If it were possible to live a perfect life, Jesus would not have become incarnate to sacrifice his perfect life for our sins. So, why did Jesus tell us to be perfect, to free us from the law and bind us with a law of perfection? Certainly not; his grace and mercy bind us! God's standards are perfect, but we are not, and his standards show us our need for Christ. The Greek word translated as perfect also carries the meaning of completeness. We are made complete in Christ; so that his perfection becomes our perfection. Our unity with Christ's perfection is the wonderful promise in the parable of the vine and branch.**

2. John describes three aspects of our fellowship with Christ in verses 1:5-2:2. Each statement includes three parts, a conditional untruth "if we claim," the result of the lie, and a contrasting truth. Each claim probably addressed teaching by false teachers.
  - a. Verses 1:6-7 What is the false claim, the result, truth, and likely false teaching
    - i. False claim? **Claim to have fellowship with God but walk in darkness**
    - ii. Result? **We lie to ourselves and do not live in truth (note we are not wrong on just one point – the truth is not in us)**
    - iii. Truth? **If we walk in the light as God as light, we have fellowship with other Christians, and Jesus' blood purifies our sins.**

- b. Verses 1:8-9
  - i. False claim? **Claim to be without sin**
  - ii. Result? **We lie to ourselves, and the truth is not in us (note we are not wrong on just one point – the truth is not in us)**
  - iii. Truth? **If we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us and purify us.**
- c. Verse 1:10
  - i. False claim? **Claim to have not sinned**
  - ii. Result? **We make God out to be a liar, and his word is not in us.**
  - iii. Truth? **If we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us and purify us.**

3. What does John say we should do when we sin?

**For emphasis, John repeated himself; we should confess our sins and Jesus will forgive us and purify us.**

4. King David is described as a man after God’s heart (1 Samuel 13:14), but David also committed gross sins and wrote, “When I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’- and you forgave my sin”. Forgiveness is found in confession, but confession does not undo the consequences of our sins. Why does God forgive, even forget our sins, but sometimes allow the consequences to remain?

**Confession is admitting our sins to God, taking responsibility for it, and accepting the consequences. Unfortunately, confession does not undo the consequences of our sins. When we sin against our neighbor, we also need to confess our actions to them to possibly undo the consequences of our actions and seek their forgiveness. Sometimes the relationship can be restored, but people are not like God, and sometimes we do not receive their forgiveness.**

**Sin lies in secrecy, and the fear of consequences can also keep us from sinning. Once the sin is exposed, taking responsibility for the consequences can lead us to repentance.**

5. God is gracious to us even when we sin. Read Romans 2:3-4 and discuss why God often spares us from the consequences of our sin.

So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?  
(Romans 2:3-4)

**God spares us the consequences of our sins so we might reflect on his mercy and kindness and forsake our sins and return to him.**

6. Confession and repentance are part of our ongoing spiritual battle with sin and our walk with God. Repentance begins with a heartfelt conviction that sin is wrong. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Repentance does not stop with emotional remorse for sin. The word repent is from a Greek compound word, “metanoeo.” “Meta” means “change,” and “noeo” means “with understanding,” so repentance is changing our behavior with remorse and understanding of the damage sin does in our relationships with others and the Holy Spirit. The change we make in repentance is turning away from sin and turning to God. What problems arise if we only focus on turning from sin?

Ac 26:20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Col 1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, Col 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Mt 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Mt 11:30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

1. **If we focus solely on our sin, we deceive ourselves into thinking our spiritual battle is a matter of our own determination and self-will rather than turning to the divine transforming power of the Holy Spirit. By focusing solely on our sins, we become depressed and burdened with guilt. We have no joy in our guilt, and our witness is weak.**
  2. **If we focus solely on receiving grace through Christ, we fail to take responsibility for our sins, confess them to God, and repent. We find forgiveness only in Christ, and Christ is quick to forgive the repentant and weary sinner. Confession and repentance are good, but the joy of obedience is better.**
7. The Apostle John’s letters contain references to obedience as a test of genuine faith throughout his letters. Following are a few examples. How might reading these verses without placing them in the context of verse 1 John 1:8, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,” lead to a misinterpretation of John’s message?
- a. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. (1 John 1:6)
  - b. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1John 2:5-6)
  - c. <sup>1Jn 3:8</sup> He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. (1 John 3:8)

- d. <sup>1Jn 3:9</sup> No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9)
- e. <sup>1Jn 3:17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 John 3:17)
- f. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. (1 John 5:2)

**We all fail to obey, love, share, and continue to sin. If we apply these verses without recognizing that we are sinners in need of a Savior, we would conclude our faith is not genuine and we are not in Christ. That is why John begins his letter with the need to recognize our sins, our need for confession, and assurance of God's forgiveness.**

- 8. What can you rightly conclude about the importance of obedience if you interpret the previous verses in 1 John in the context of 1 John 1:8-9, admitting and confessing our sin?

**We are called to love God with our whole heart, soul, and mind and our neighbors ourselves. We recognize the weakness of our love and failures in our thoughts, words, and deeds. But God is loving and gracious and forgives our failures and sins as we confess them. We are called to be set apart as God's holy people. We are called to change; our actions and words should not look like those around us or our lives before we believed in Christ. God places his Spirit in us to guide and transform us. Sometimes we are caught in a struggle with habitual sin. But, our struggle with obedience and sin is evidence that the Holy Spirit is guiding us to new behaviors and is at work within us.**

- 9. In verse 2:1, John provides another assurance of our faith; Jesus speaks to the Father in our defense. When we judge ourselves by our obedience, we can become depressed by our failures our prideful in our successes – works prepared by God and guided by the Holy Spirit! God makes abundant provision for faith so that we have complete assurance in our unity with him. Consider God's actions in making provisions for your faith and discuss how any one stands out in your life:
  - a. God's love for you before creation
  - b. God's sovereignty over events that brought you to Christ
  - c. God's adoption of you as his child and his loving guidance
  - d. God's redemption of your sinful life through Christ's blood
  - e. God's promise to forgive and forget your sins, so they have no standing with him
  - f. God's revelation to you of his plan of salvation through Christ
  - g. God's placing you in union with Christ through faith
  - h. God's provision for union with him through the sacraments
  - i. God's gift of the abiding Holy Spirit to guide, convict, and comfort you
  - j. God's call to be Christ's disciple
  - k. God's provision of other believers to nurture and guide you (a cloud of witnesses)
  - l. God's grace – includes all these actions and many more!

**These days, I am struck by how I am completely in God's hands and always have been. God brought me to Christ and keeps me in him. I am particularly grateful for the cloud of witnesses who have ministered to me over the years. One was the pastor who shared the scriptures with me at age 24 and gave me an understanding of salvation through Christ. Many other godly men and women have encouraged and guided me along the way, and I thank God for sending all of them.**

10. The words "obey my commands" sound like obeying the law in the Old Covenant. But we live under a new Covenant in Christ because people could not obey the laws of Moses. Do you think the command of obedience is the same or different in the New Covenant? Refer to the following scriptures in your discussion.

Heb 8:8 But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

Heb 8:9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

Heb 8:10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jn 15:17 **This is my command: Love each other.**

1Jn 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

2Co 3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant —not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, **"Take and eat; this is my body."** Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, **"Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."** (Matthew 26:26-28)

**The discussion may vary widely on the similarities and dissimilarities between the old and new covenants. The main point of the question is to view God's command of obedience as an act of love and devotion, not as a burden.**

11. In his book *Fresh Wind Fresh Fire*, Jim Cymbal talks about the transformation the Holy Spirit has made in the lives of his parishioners in the Brooklyn Tabernacle. Some were addicts, prostitutes,

pimps, homeless, and transvestites, radically transformed and freed from their former lifestyle to faith in Christ, never returning to their former lifestyle. Other members of his parish were baptized Christians, raised in Christian homes and were spared many of the afflictions plaguing our society. Other members continue to struggle with their sins despite their sincere confession and repentance. They seem to be living in the desert wilderness, like the Israelites of the Exodus, God testing and molding their faith and character.

How is the Holy Spirit transforming you?

- a. Radical transformation and healing?
- b. Spared many temptations?
- c. Tried and tested in the wilderness?

### **The discussion will vary.**

12. God's abundant blessings are found in obedience. Read the following passages and identify the blessing.

- a. <sup>Jn 15:10</sup> **If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**

In obedience, we find **joy**.

- b. <sup>1Jn 3:21</sup> Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God <sup>22</sup> and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

In obedience, we find **confidence in prayer**.

- c. <sup>Phil 4:9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

In obedience, we find **God's peace**.

- d. <sup>Lk 11:28</sup> He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

In obedience, we are **blessed**.

- e. <sup>Mt 7:24</sup> **"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.**

In obedience, we become **wise and mature**.



- f. <sup>Ro 12:1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In obedience, we understand **God’s will for us.**

- g. <sup>Phil 2:1</sup> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

In obedience, we become **like-minded with other believers**

13. A life of obedience is not meant to be burdensome or a series of “thou shall not.” When obedience is an act of love and devotion, it becomes a joy. Obedience is also linked to perseverance and discipline. One of my favorite images of a Christian life is an athlete who has been in rigorous training for the race and is now persevering toward the finish, “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>Phil 3:14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). What is your mental image of a life of perseverance and obedience?

**There may be obstacles to forget behind the runner, stumbling, falling, brokenness, and entanglements, but the race is on, and the end is in sight. The runner gives their all as the finish line comes into view and leans into the tape to win the prize they have trained so hard for. Let us press toward the goal by loving God and others and seeking to do the acts of charity God stored up for us since before creation.**

### **Closing, Psalm 86, A Prayer of David**

<sup>Ps 86:1</sup> Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

<sup>Ps 86:2</sup> Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you.

<sup>Ps 86:3</sup> Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long.

<sup>Ps 86:4</sup> Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

AMEN