

What Do You Get Out Of Obeying God?

Rich Nathan

June 3-4, 1995

Evangelism: The Heart of the Father

Matthew 19:27-20:16

Matthew 19:27- 20:16

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." For my kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the market place doing nothing. He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You also go and work in my Vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first." The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "These men who were hired last worked one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of work and the heat of the day." But he answered one of them, "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Now, what Jesus is describing in this story of the workers in the vineyard is the world's strangest economy. I mean, imagine the outcry from the unions and the lawsuits that would be filed if an employer dared to treat his or her employees this way. You know, there is no overtime mentioned for the guys who work more than an 8-hour shift. There is a possible violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Equal Pay Act. There is no mention here of break times or meal times or sick time. He is not saying all the workers get time and a half for overtime. And

since, obviously, the market conditions have changed after the landowner bargained with his original employees, the employees ought to get the opportunity to renegotiate their contracts, right? I mean isn't that the argument that ball players make now? All right, I realize that I signed for the paltry sum of three million dollars a year to pitch every fifth day when I feel okay and when I don't have tendonitis or when my shoulder isn't sore or when I am not in for therapy. But a man can't be expected to live on 3 million a year. And what, after all, are we talking about in the willingness of an employer to renegotiate, we are just talking about respect. This is not about money. The ball players always say that, right? It is not about the money. It is about being respected as a man. See, it is never an issue of money. It is an issue of respect.

Could you imagine the Labor Secretary of the United States, or a politician advocating the kind of system that we read about here? Suggesting that employers could do whatever they wanted in paying their employees any old way. How long do you think such a labor secretary or politician would last? What do you think the editorial writers and the columnists and workers would do after they firebombed his plant?

Well, even if an employer could deal with the protests and the signs and the newspapers and the outcries, a little bit of reality would quickly settle in for that employer because the next day when the employer went down to the labor market, whether it is the local street corner or the employment bureau or the temporary agency, that employer would quickly find that no one is going to work for him or her. Why should they? If everyone gets paid exactly the same at the end of the day, why work your fanny off and then have someone come along later? Why don't we all just sit around and wait?

You see this begins to raise a religious question, of course. What difference does it make, Peter is asking, if we serve God faithfully for 50 years, if you end up getting the same pay as everyone else? You know, if a person, who lives for themselves for their whole life, does what they want with women and spends all of their money on themselves buying new gadgets and the latest cars. One who is basically self-indulgent? Somewhere after they get the doctor's report that they are dying of cancer, they don't have much time, they get an attack of religion and repent on their death bed—if they get the same pay as a person who has been obedient their whole lives and tried to walk with God and gave things up for God—if they both get the same pay, why not just wait? Let's eat, drink and be merry during our lives and then sometime before we die get right with God and we will get heaven thrown in. What a deal!

Now, I want to tell you that I am not just raising a theoretical question. This is a very real question that exists in the minds of many people.

I went down to The Ohio State University again this week with some folks from the Vineyard and some students who are Christians down at Ohio State University. We went down to the oval where we had the opportunity to talk with students who were just catching some rays on the oval. We had the opportunity

to talk with some students about Jesus and the value of starting a relationship with Jesus.

The last guy I talked with was real interesting. He was real sincere and he kept looking down and shaking his head. He said to me, "I know what you are saying is true." You could see that God was tugging on him. He kept repeating over and over again, "I understand what you are saying. I understand. I agree. I know it is true. But you are asking such a huge thing of me." He literally said that. "You are asking such a big thing of me. I am young."

I just smiled. I almost started to laugh. I said, "Well, let me try to retranslate what you are telling me, okay? What you are saying to me is basically, 'Hey, Rich, don't you remember what you felt like when you were twenty? I mean I have these hormones just pumping in my body, man, and I like women. You are asking me to give that up and follow Jesus. I know Jesus is true, but why can't I wait until I am old, 'til I am worn out? And I won't be that interested in sex when I am old and I will probably be too tired from partying and all of that. At that point, I promise you, man, I will get an attack of religion like all old people do. I will only be able to gum my food anyway. That is a good time to turn to Christ. Religion is for old people and not for young, healthy guys or young pretty women.'"

Why should I obey God now and what God is saying to me now instead of waiting? I want to point out a few things that Jesus doesn't say which are totally valid answers to this question. You know, what would you say to that student who says, "Hey, I am young. I am enjoying life. Why can't I wait?" Or what would you say to Peter who says, "What do we get out of this Jesus? What do we get out of this? What is our take-home for obeying God?"

I think of the typical answer that we could give to that young man on campus or to Peter. We could say, "Well, how do you know that you could be alive tomorrow? You say you want to wait to turn to God and you want to wait on repenting and embracing God in your soul." Well, I knew a young man once who said the same thing to me and then we tell the cement truck story, right? You know the cement truck story?

Yeah, there was a young man who said, "Oh, I will wait until I get old." Well, he left the meeting and was driving out in his car. He was turning on the radio to listen to some grunge music or something. And a cement truck rolled over the top of his car. That young man never got a chance to repent. Who knows where his soul is right now?

Well, I am saying it in somewhat sarcastic tones, but that is a really valid biblical answer. Who knows what tomorrow brings, the Bible asks us. We don't know. We don't know whether we are going to live or die. Those of us who have been recently touched by death, those of you who have lost a child or a spouse prematurely, you work in a hospital or in a health care profession, you see what goes on in an emergency room and some of you are daily confronted with the reality of the brevity of life and how transient we are and how we don't know what

the future brings. It is totally valid to say to someone who says, “Why shouldn’t I wait?” to say, “How do you know that you will have the time?” because there are no guarantees in this life, friend.

Well, I didn’t give him that answer. I didn’t tell him the cement truck story. What I did remind the student was that there was no guarantee that he would be as interested in Jesus next Tuesday as he was right now. Or, even more, next year as he is right now. You know, there is an urgency in responding to the tug of God on your heart? The truth is that God does not always strive with us, the Bible says. God does not always tug. And if we feel the tug of God in a certain direction, you hear God’s voice and he is speaking to you about something—a relationship with a boyfriend or a girlfriend and he is saying, “Hey, I want you to change that,” thus sayeth the Lord. Thus sayeth the Lord, you need to forgive. You need to give up this sin. You need to open up your hands. What God is saying is, “Thus sayeth the Lord, it is time to release control of your life to the Lordship, the rulership of Jesus.” And as you feel his tug, you resist it and say, “No, I want to wait.” Even though the issue is crystal clear.

Well, I want to tell you that it won’t remain crystal clear forever. You will get preoccupied again with your work or with your personal problems or relationships or money or your kids, or your business. The window of opportunity to respond to the tug of God is not always there and it is not always felt the same way.

The kingdom of God, to me, has always felt like a merry-go-round. Where you are sitting on the horse and you are going around. Standing next to the merry-go-round at one point is Jesus with his hand out to you. As you pass by, you have to reach out your hand and grab the hand of Jesus. Because if you don’t, if you just pull your hand back in and say, “I am going to wait,” you get farther and farther away. It is harder and harder to reach back. The longer you wait in obeying God, the longer you harden your heart, the harder it is to find Christ. I have watched this. Jesus is not always there in the same degree. It is an illusion. It is a myth that I can turn to God tomorrow. He is not always there with the same pressure, with the same tug as he is right now.

That is why the Bible always says, “Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” If you don’t obey God today, what difference are you going to feel in your heart tomorrow? What is it about tomorrow that will change anything?

I have watched the kingdom of God go around now for 22 years. I have seen in my own life that when I didn’t grab hold, it didn’t come around to me again in terms of the same clarity regarding issues for months, sometimes years. I have watched in people’s lives that they didn’t get that window of opportunity again for decades.

Jesus could have said to Peter, “Peter, what do you get out of obeying God now? Well, you get out of it the opportunity to respond to the tug of God and you won’t get that tomorrow.”

But you know, Jesus didn't answer that way either. Jesus didn't give the cement truck analogy and Jesus didn't give the message of urgency in obeying. Oh, yes, he does mention rewards. We do get rewards from obeying now and in the future. But he gives somewhat short shrift to that because I think he basically is trying to communicate to Peter, "Listen Peter, the first thing I want to remind you is that God is no one's debtor." At the end of the day, he will not be in your debt. Never fear, God will pay you what you deserve.

But the truth is, Jesus in this story, I believe confirms Peter's worst fears. Peter is saying, "Jesus, what do we get out of obeying God and sacrificing for God? What do you get out of denying yourself? Waiting until you get married to have sex? What is the net take home of tithing? Someone else spends money on himself or herself. What do you get out of serving in God's church? Being involved in world missions? Working hard in the Vineyard?"

Now, the parable we are going to look at is not about rewards – Jesus, is not saying, "No matter what you do, you all get the same reward" nor is it about salvation – we don't work for our salvation. I believe the parable is about motives for obedience. And in Jesus' answer, I think we are being brought right into the very heart of God. Jesus is telling us a very profound thing about the heart of God. That is as he takes us into God's heart, we are like on a rocket ship and we are flying right into the center of the sun, as we fly in and plunge into the heart of God, Jesus is saying, "What you are going to find in the heart of God is this mysterious word called 'grace.'" You are going to find grace in the center of God's being. And unless you understand grace you will never figure out what you get from walking with God. To the extent you still think in legalistic terms—I will do this and God will do that for me, you won't figure out why you should be a Christian or why follow God. The only way to figure out God is to begin to understand that the Father's heart is a heart of grace.

Let's explore this a little bit. As you get in touch with the heart of God and discover his grace, you start touching that unmerited grace. Unmerited grace in the Bible means undeserved favor, unmerited kindness to the entirely undeserving. As you begin to get in touch with grace, it begins to change the way you think about things. I have listed five things that change, that we see differently as we get more and more in touch with the Father, this gracious heart.

The first thing that I think we see differently is time and how you measure time. Because grace changes your view of time. See, this whole business of going and working for 11 hours or working for God for one hour, in this case it was actually working for 11 hours and one hour, but I think that depending on whether you have grace in your heart something can seem like 11 hours when it is one hour. If you have no grace, it can seem like you are working 11 hours when you are only working for one hour. Grace changes your view of how you measure time.

You know, the Bible teaches that with the Lord, (2 Peter 3:8) a thousand years is like a day and a day is like a thousand years. Have you ever noticed that depending on whether you have grace and love in your heart, time can just seem like it drags on forever or it can seem really short? I mean when you don't have grace and love in your heart, man, time just drags. It just seems fixed in place. Talk about working 11 hours, it seems like you are working for 11 years when you don't have love in your heart.

I remember before Marlene and I had children. We were asked to baby-sit someone else's kid. The kid began crying and wouldn't stop crying. I mean, I wasn't marking time with a clock, I was marking it with a calendar. I was just counting the seconds. Marlene, we only have 7859 seconds to go! All right, it is 7858...

When we had our own children, on the other hand, the time is going so quickly. All of you parents, don't you feel like, my goodness [on good days] my goodness, I can't believe they are almost out of the house. There are only three more years, or five more years or ten more years before they are gone. See, when you are in love time just flies.

That is what it says about Jacob, by the way, when he was serving Laban. It says in Genesis 29:20 that Jacob served 7 years to get his wife, Rachel. But it seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. When you are in love there is just not enough time. It seems so short.

Hey, there is nobody who gets to really know Jesus at age 9 in the first hour and walks with Jesus who says, "Gee, I wish I had waited to give my life to God. Boy, I wasted a lot of time." On the other hand, there is no one who gives their life to God at age 90, you know the 11th hour person, who repents on their death bed who ends up saying, "Wow, I got away so cheaply. I can't believe how cheap I bought heaven. What a great deal I made. I just spent my life living for myself and now I get heaven thrown in." No one says that. People who turn to God later in life always say, "I am so sorry that I wasted so much time. I could have had Jesus earlier and I didn't. I thought I was experiencing freedom. I look back with so many regrets in so many areas." I am telling you, friends, grace changes your view of time and how long we have to obey God. Because when you are in love and you are touched by the love of God, it just seems like those 11 hours are compressed to one hour. There is just not enough time to do the work of God when you are touched by grace.

Grace also changes your view of the heat of the day. You know, in this story in verse 12 the first hour workers complained to the landowner saying, "These men who were hired last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work in the heat of the day."

No one who is touched by grace and really plunges into the Father says something like that. I have never heard anyone who went through difficulty and trial, have said to God, "You know, as a result of this difficulty and trial, I am

expecting a much bigger payday at the end” if they were in touch with God during the trial. The only people who make this kind of statement are people who are not in touch with God and who do not feel his favor and his grace. Because if you feel his favor, if you feel that undeserved kindness of God, then you say as you have looked back on the heat of the day experiences, the very difficult moments of your life, times of watching someone you love get ill, times of business struggle, times of relational tear, you say, “Oh, God, I never could have gotten through that without you. And I know you had something in this heat of the day experience for me that I never could have gotten had everything gone well for me. You have left a deposit in my life that never would have been there had I not been through this. I would not have freely chosen this beforehand, but God your ways are best. I am not expecting anything more or a greater reward because I learned that, indeed, even when I am walking through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Grace changes your view of heat of the day experiences.

And grace changes your view of others, especially other people who are being blessed. You know, you will be able to measure as we are going to see in a moment, how much grace is in your heart by how you respond to the blessing, to the favor, that another person is experiencing. That is such an incredible test for whether you are in touch with the grace of God. How do you approach the blessing that is in another person’s life?

You see, in this story the workers who had been hired in the first hour were fine with what was offered to them. The one denarius a day, which by the way was the pay that a common laborer in the fields would be paid at that time. They were fine with their agreement until they began to see what the other workers were getting. And it says in verse 9, *“the workers who were hired about the 11th hour came and each received a denarius.”* And it was only after they saw what the others were getting that they began to get upset. And so it says in verse 10, *“when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more, but each one of them also received a denarius. And when they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. These men who were hired last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work in the heat of the day.”*

Isn’t it true that we, generally, are okay and, generally, content with our portion in life until we see someone else who seems to be getting ahead? I mean you may be quite content with your home until you walk into a much bigger home, a much better decorated home. Then you go back to your house and you say, “Gee, I don’t have very much at all. I don’t like my house.”

You are real content with your car until you get into a much nicer car. That is the idea that car dealers have when they attempt to get you to test drive the newest car. If they can get you into it and get you to feel the plush leather seats and what it is like to drive that new piece of metal, and then you climb back into your rusted-out heap, you are going to feel profound discontent.

Isn't it the case that you are generally doing well until you look at others? And that is where you feel the rub. You see that younger person who has a nicer body than you; that other person who is getting ahead of you in business, making more money and having more clients; you feel fine about yourself until you see that someone else's ministry is more grand than yours. They are getting more attention. The church is getting bigger. I know that as a pastor. I will talk with someone and they will tell me about all the blessings that are on their church. I was doing fine until they told me about all the great things that are happening in their little corner of the world. I, then, begin to think, "Oh, my goodness. We don't have anything."

Well you know, when you are in this state of mind of being upset with the blessing and the goodness of God toward others, there will be 50 or a 100 people to come along and encourage you in your upset. While you pity yourself for how meager the kindness of God has been toward you and how unjust God has been and how little you have gotten out of life, while you lick your wounds I guarantee you will be able to find people who will sit down with you and lick your wound too. You all have a pity party together and they will say, "Yes, yes, indeed, life has been so hard for you and you have a right to be bitter. These people haven't been good to you and everything has been set up against you. You are not getting what you deserve."

I want to tell you, friend, that there is one person who loves you enough, that in his grace, will confront you and get underneath your self-pity with his truth. There is only one person who loves you enough to speak the truth to you when you are upset with what life has dealt you, and, especially when you are upset as your eyes are on someone else and you're dealing with all the things that are going on in their lives. That is God our Father.

Do you want to know about the Father's gracious heart? He doesn't just lick people's wounds. In grace, I mean in true grace, he confronts them. Look at what he says. He says three things to the self-pitying worker that just come like hammer blows and really go after what is going on in this person's heart and what is really going on in your heart, you person who is jealous.

Friend, you say your concern is justice? You are upset because I haven't been just? Look at verse 13: *"But he answered them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.'"*

In other words, you say your concern is justice, well, let me tell you something friend. You will never get one ounce less than you deserve or than you agree to. You will never get a penny less than you deserve from God. You are not upset because you are getting less, you are upset because it seems like God is giving them more. Which leads to God's second point with us.

The second point is if you are upset because of the blessing that is falling on someone undeserving, then really you have a problem with God. Jesus says,

"The landowner says, 'Or are you envious because I am generous?'" God is generous; that's just the way he is!

See, over and over again when God is cutting the knot between what we do and what we expect God's response to be and he tries to teach us grace, in these stories he is really attacking the Pharisaical attitude in us that just doesn't like God's generosity. That looks at other people and their half-heartedness, their seeming lukewarmness to God, the fact that they don't seem to be that diligent in their prayers or that obedient. God blesses them. And God regularly in teaching us the lesson of grace says, "Hey, friend, you better start getting used to this one thing and that is this is the way God is." God is gracious. You need to adjust yourself to this central truth you who are bitter about what someone else has. God is generous. It is just the way of God to give people more than they deserve. He is extravagant. And if you don't like that, God is not going to change. He will always be extravagant. He will always give people more than they deserve.

The fact is, friend, Jesus goes on to say to the self-pitying, your problem is not a problem with the justice of God as you think. Your problem is that you are envious. Verse 15: *"Or are you envious because I am generous?"* Oh my goodness, he just doesn't let us off the hook. Grace calls things in our life what they are. See, the test again of how much grace is in your life is how much you enjoy watching someone else getting blessed. Legalists never like watching someone else get blessed, never. They just get angrier and angrier the more we hear about the blessing of others because a legalist always needs to stand on someone and push them down in order to feel good about themselves.

You can tell about how much grace is in a church by how they speak about other churches. That is a good test. Because no matter what they say about grace, if other churches are always being put down, that is a legalistic church because that church doesn't enjoy the blessing that is somewhere else. If a spirit of criticism and competition is just widespread in a church, then that church is just demonstrating to the world, we have not experienced the grace of God. There is so little of the life of God here that we must shoot at everyone else. You cannot feel God's favor for yourself while you have your eyes on someone else, but you must see that your self-pitying attitude, your feelings of injustice, are just the sin of envy. And you are just simply confessing the lack of grace in your own life. You don't enjoy the generosity of God; God is not going to change.

This leads to the fourth thing and that is that grace changes our view of God's freedom. You know, when you begin to feel the grace of God, not only will you enjoy God's blessing on others, but you also are going to start enjoying God's freedom. Verse 15 states it real well. *"Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?"*

In other words, "Am I not free to do what I want?" says the Lord. Can't I do whatever I want? Don't I have that right to rule, to the sovereign of the universe? Am I not the Lord?

What I see from the first hour people to the eleventh hour people is this progress regarding God's freedom and how we understand obeying him. Let me share with you four stages in the progress of obedience.

The first stage is to say to God, "No matter what you say, God, I won't obey you." Now, we don't find those people in this story. They are not willing to work in the vineyard. They don't want to do what God says. No matter what you say, God, I am going to go ahead and get divorced. Or I am going to go ahead and have sex. I am going to go ahead and hold onto my anger and bitterness. Or my self-pity. I won't forgive. I won't let go. I don't care what you say. I am just going to harden my heart. I am not going to yield control to Jesus. That is the first stage.

The second stage is to bargain. Where a person says to God, I will obey what you say, God, if you bless me first. That is what the first hour guys says. We strike a bargain like Jacob did in the Old Testament early on in his walk with God. If you do this for me, God, then I will do that. That is like the first hour people. We make sure that God signs on the dotted line before we take a step. Before I work in the vineyard, guarantee my pay.

Well, God, if you bless my business, then I will obey you. If you heal my kid, then I will obey you. If you give me a husband or a wife, then I will obey you.

The third step in progress of obedience is to say to God, "God, I will obey you, trusting you to bless me in the future." And that is like the third hour people. They are saying, "I have heard the promise that you will bless if I obey" I am going to obey you trusting that you will do well by me in the future.

Well, the last step in the progress of obedience is like the eleventh hour guys who say, "God, I will obey you no matter what you do. I am just going to go out and work in the vineyard whether I get a blessing in the future out of obedience or not. Like Jesus' response to the Father in John 14:31 where Jesus says, *"The world must learn that I love my Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me."* I have no other motives than just to let the world know that there is somebody who still will do what God tells them to do.

What I see in those stages of obedience is a progressive enjoyment of the freedom that God has to simply be the Lord. I think the more grace gets into your life, the more you enjoy God's Lordship and his freedom. You know there isn't much grace in a person's life that bargains with God. If you do this, God, then I will do that. That is not terrible to do. I am not putting it down. I am just saying that is an early stage. I will tell you, beware of bargaining with God. Beware of striking a bargain with God because it may be that he will give you exactly what you ask for. You know, "God if you give me this job, I will do such and such." If you give me this person, I will do such and such for you. I will obey you. God may just give you that job. He may give you that person as a spouse. Far better to not bargain with God.

It says in Ephesians 3:20 that God gives people exceedingly and abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Far better to say to God, "God, you deal with the results, with the future, with what you want to give me, that is up to you. I will let you be free. I am just going to obey you" rather than determine for you at the front end what you should get.

Grace changes a person's view of the freedom of God. God says to us, "Am I not free to do what I want with what I have?"

What I am trying to say, friends, is that as you grow in love for God and in enjoyment of God's grace, we just get less controlling of God and less manipulative. You start respecting God's freedom. And when people start demanding an accounting of God's freedom from the Lord, "Why am I still single? Explain yourself God! Why are there no good men in this church? Or good women? Why are you not bringing across my path the partner that I have asked you for? You had better explain yourself, God." Explain yourself, as a result of this illness. Or as a result of my business failure. Or the result of this particular way that I have been treated by people. That shows we don't have that much grace in our lives.

A grace-filled person just says, "God, you don't have to explain yourself to me. I don't need a massive explanation of your ways. After all, you are in heaven and I am on the earth. You are above me and I am below you. You are enormous and I am so tiny. For you to explain your ways to me, God, would be like an elephant trying to explain his ways to a fly." I couldn't understand him. I couldn't fit anyway.

Friend, if you like the idea of God's ruler ship; if you like thinking and meditating on God's sovereignty, that is that God does what God likes; if that thrills your heart, the liberty of God and you don't feel the need to control God or to turn God into your servant or your genie, you are being brought into the heart of God, his grace. Because grace always liberates. When grace is in your hearts, you get much less controlling of other people. You let them be. And you get less controlling of God and you let him be.

Which leads to our last point. That is grace changes your view of obedience. The question that we began with was, "What do we get out of obeying God and walking with God? Why should we? Why should we sacrifice and respond to God as he tugs on us? Why walk with God for 50 years? What does a man or woman get out of turning to God?"

What do we get out of obeying God? I believe we get two things from obeying God and walking with God. The first thing is that we get God's views and God's heart. I think first we gain an appreciation of God's grace – that is, that he really intends to bless us through his commands and he really intends to keep us from the pain of disobedience. In other words, obedience is graciously designed for our good. Through the talk I have said that when grace comes to you and you begin to embrace grace it changes your views of things. I believe that is one

thing that you get out of obeying God. Your view of everything in life changes. You start looking at life differently.

You start seeing that disobedience does lead to hurt and pain. One reason God gives commands is to prevent sorrow and to maximize happiness. Let's just take one area: sex. I read a book a couple of years ago that published an enormous survey – 100,000 women filled out surveys on sexuality. You know what it found out? Sexually liberated women, women who see nothing wrong with sex outside marriage and have had multiple partners were the most dissatisfied people sexually. In contrast, the more religious a person was, the more satisfied sexually. Who cares about your happiness? The Devil? The Devil would love to see you get Herpes or Chlamydia or be pregnant at age 18. Or God, who made your body and designed it to work according to his laws?

Initially, when you confront one of the ways of God that cuts counter to your flesh and you stand on the outside of that and hear that word that says you need to stop this or change that. Boy, it just seems so difficult to you and it seems so unfair. It seems so restrictive. So long as you are outside of the commandment, and it is just coming at you as some kind of external force, you just don't get it at all. Why not get divorced? Why not do what I want to do?

But as you open yourself up to obey and you begin to enter into the commands of God and what God says, what happens is that you start changing your perspective. It happens to me every time. And I begin to see the wisdom of God's ways. I begin to enjoy the way God has ordered things. In fact, it not only just seems wise to me how God has ordered this and what God has commanded me to do, but I actually begin to love it. God, it not only is wise to me, but God, it is actually attractive to me. God, I don't hate the Bible anymore about this or that. The more I walk in obedience, the more I actually love what God says. It is so right. It is so clear. It is so good. It really works. It is so much better than my ways regarding my family or relationships or how I would respond or react. Oh, I see now God.

The first thing I think a person gets out of obeying God is a changed view of all of life. The second thing I think a person gets all the time out of obeying God is the privilege of working together with God. I have expressed this, friends, so many times to you. But you see, it is so important that we change our "have to" mentality regarding giving or the cause of Christ, regarding Jesus himself—do I have to obey? Do I have to serve in the Vineyard? Do I have to do ministry? Do I have to go to a kinship or men's group or women's group? Do I have to read my Bible?

It is so important that you change your "have to" mentality to a "get to" mentality. Those who are obedient and begin to enjoy the grace of God stop using the words, "do I have to?" and they start feeling, "Oh, my goodness, what a privilege, I get to." I get to feel God's heart for someone who is sick when I pray. I get to minister as many of you do to AIDS patients. We have a large AIDS ministry here in the church. It ministers to children with AIDS. It ministers to

young men who are dying with AIDS in this city and to young women. Do you have to pray for someone who is dying? No. The people involved say, "I get to." Do I have to hand out a bag of groceries at the food pantry? Do I have to go down there? No, we get to. Do I have to share my faith and help someone not only obtain life after death but get life before death?

Grace changes obedience to God from a burden to a privilege—the privilege of being a co-worker. You know, those of you who enjoy acting, theater, we have a couple of students here who are in theater departments and a couple of teachers of drama—if you were called up by a world famous director, Laurence Olivier, a famous actor or actress from the past or someone present, I want to work together with you. What would you say? Do I have to? Or what a privilege, I get to.

Baseball players here, you get a call from a really great manager like Earl Weaver or a great hitter like Ted Williams or Ken Griffey, Jr. And they say, "Hey, I would like to get together with you to give you some pointers on hitting. I would like to work on your hitting." You would say, "Do I have to? Or get to?"

Those of you who like to sing. You get a call from some singer or rock group and they ask you to sing with them on tour. Do I have to?

I enjoy sharing my faith. If Billy Graham called me up and said, "Rich, I am doing this big crusade, I would really enjoy it if you would work with me. We are going to these stadiums filled with people." Billy, do I have to do that?

The Lord God of the universe comes along to you and says to you, "I want you to work together with me in my vineyard. Yes, you may bear the burden of the heat of the day and it may be really tough for you and easy for someone else. But even in the heat of the day, you get to work together with God. See, the Father is right out there in the vineyard with you. The Father is right there with you. You are not doing it yourself. Whenever you take your steps of obedience, the Father is right there with you. Whenever you respond to God, it is because he has been tugging on your heart first. He is right there with you.

What do I get out of obedience to God? I get the wonderful privilege of working together with him. Let's pray.