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## Obeying to Fulfill Duty

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Free media and discipleship resources for pastors, leaders, and growing disciples.

# Obeying to Fulfill Duty

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When signing up for a new account online, have you ever read the small print statement before clicking the “I accept” button? The authors of those documents try to cover every possible contingency. Imagine, then, if the Christian life was similar and had a rule for every scenario a person could ever face. How thick of a document would that be? (i.e. Please turn to page 732 for “encountering a stray cat when you’re late for a meeting.”)

 JOL obey as duty

Fortunately, while Jesus does expect us to act in certain ways, we’re not doomed to memorizing endless lists of rules. Of course, we sometimes exchange living with Jesus for the goal of following all the rules perfectly. A strange thing happens to us, though, when we fixate on following the rules. Our relationship with Jesus atrophies.

Authentic love for Jesus begins to shrivel, strangled in growing arrogance and self-sufficiency. We begin to think that if we can follow all the rules through our own effort, then God values us a little more. More than whom? More than our neighbor!

So the life with Jesus that is supposed to be a thankful journey rooted in love for God and others becomes, instead, a self-focused competition. We have a mental scorecard where we see either God or ourselves as the point-assigning judge. We no longer need God and love for our neighbor is replaced with a sense of superiority, judgment, or pity. Comparison with others or a standard of perfection can also leave us with the joy-strangling dread that we aren’t good enough.

Jesus had very strong words for the people of His day, the Pharisees, who had reduced obedience to following rules at the expense of relationship with God. In Matthew 23, He blasts them with:

*“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former....”*

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”*

*- Matthew 23:23, 27, 28, NIV*

Did you notice how in the first statement in verse 23, Jesus doesn't expect us to ignore the rules? He wants our lives to be transformed by closeness to Him. Then we can wisely apply what we know He desires of us to all the grey areas of life. A relationship isn't as neat and clean as a checklist of rules, but it is so much more honoring to Him and life-giving to us.

“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20, NIV). God is with us. This truth is the melody heard throughout scripture from Genesis to Revelation. It is a theme of courage and joy, assuring us that we don't have to live this life alone! As we grow to accept His love and love Him in return, He helps us grow in wisdom so we can live joyfully obedient lives because we are close to Him.