

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 35—Our Obligation to Obey God’s Revealed Will, Q. 39

Our Duty to God

- I. What is the duty which God requires of man and which man owes to God?
 - A. *Obedience*. We’re all in a state of subjection to God, Isa 40.28. He is our Superior and we’re to obey Him in all things, Mt 22.37-38. Every ordinance stamped with His authority, whatever is subscribed with a “Thus saith the Lord,” is to be immediately and perfectly obeyed.
- II. Of whom does the Lord require obedience?
 - A. *Of all men* capable of knowing His will, without exception. No man can be free of this duty any more than he can be free of God, Acts 17.28; Rom 11.36.
- III. What is the rule of this obedience?
 - A. *The revealed will of God*. His will is our supreme law—not His secret decretive will, but His revealed preceptive will, Dt 29.29. His decretive will embraces His eternal purposes and, as far as we know it, it’s to be believed and revered; but His preceptive will, made known to us in His Word, is to be received and obeyed as our rule of life, whether relating to what we are to believe or do, WSC 2-3.
- IV. What are the properties of this obedience which God requires?
 - A. It must be *sincere*. Hypocritical obedience may please man, who only looks for external conformity, but it does not, cannot, please God, the searcher of hearts, who looks for an internal reality behind the external show. Man weighs the affections by actions, but God weighs a man’s actions by the affections from which they spring, cp. Gen 34.13-29 with 1Sam 16.6-7; Heb 11.17.
 - B. It must be *constant*. Man is always doing something; and everything He does is to be within the parameters of the law under which he lives, Ps 119.44. Obedience is unacceptable when it comes by fits and starts, on our terms, when we feel like it, and broken off again at our pleasure. As God’s law is ever binding, so is man’s obligation to it.
 - C. It must be *tender*. We must have a tender conscience toward all sin of all shades and sorts, 1Th 5.22. “We must not rub the hedge or walk too near the borders of wickedness,” seeing how much wiggle room we can find in the law, how close we can get to the edge of wickedness, trying to do as little as possible that’ll pass for obedience. Living like that is evidence of a very wicked heart still in the bonds of iniquity.
 - D. It must be *ready*. We must do and not delay; we must obey and not dispute, Ps 119.60. Jonah was rebuked because he did not immediately obey, Abraham was commended because He did, Heb 11.8; Gen 22.2-3. The least intimation of God’s will, either as a deed to be done or a providence to be suffered, must be immediately obeyed, despite all discouragements and carnal reasonings. Without this readiness and alacrity, our obedience is null and void, Mt 6.10.
 - E. It must be *universal*. All of God’s Commandments have the same divine stamp upon them, Ps 119.6; Js 2.10-11. “Obedience to one command will never sanctify or justify disobedience to another; because the contempt shown to one is a contempt of the Lawgiver of them all.” *Moreover*, he who makes no conscience to obey any one known commandment reveals hypocrisy in his obedience to all the rest, because if he can knowingly and proudly slight God in the one commandment then it’s either *not God* whom he’s minding in all the others, or it’s *not obedience* which he’s offering to God in all the others.
 - F. It must be *absolute*. The commandments of our superiors are to be obeyed only insofar as they don’t contradict God’s commandments. But God’s commandments are to be obeyed absolutely, without any reserve, even if they’re contradicted by all the world, Acts 4.19.
 - G. It must be *perfect*. The obedience God calls for is exact, precise, and to the letter. There’s no place for close enough, good try, or grading on a scale. Nothing pleases the perfectly holy God but perfection, especially since anything short of perfection isn’t an excusable defect, but sin. And even though He accepts sincere obedience from those that are in Christ, yet a perfect obedience is still

required of them. They're not being excused or graded on a different scale. His acceptance of their evangelical obedience is only on account of the fact that Christ has already rendered a perfect obedience on their behalf.

Inferences

- I. The standard of right and wrong is eternal in the heavens, unchangeably one and eternally the same. *The truth* to be believed and *the right* to be done are not relative, either to man, or nations, or eras, or cultures. It exists as an eternal and inflexible reflection of the holiness and perfection of the eternal God. His will is law and His law is Himself.
- II. Our duty to God is not to be measured by our imagination or by the imagination of others, but only by the revealed will of God.
 - A. Thus, the doing of what God does not command will never be accepted as that which He does command. Obedience must be rendered according to the law and will of God.
 - B. If God has revealed His will to us, then nothing but what He's commanded can lawfully be the object of our duty.
- III. See the absolute necessity of being found in the righteousness of Christ!
 - A. None of us can render even one aspect of the nature of the obedience God requires. In our fallen condition, under the curse of a broken law already, we have nothing to give, Isa 64.6; Rom 3.23.
 - B. Our only hope is to acknowledge God's right and our due, to confess our inability, emptiness, and guilt, and then reach for the plank of the gospel in the open sea of our guilt, laying hold of the provision He's provided in His Son, Jn 3.16.
 - C. And as we look for acceptance with God through the merits and mediation of Christ alone, then let us zealously lay ourselves out to do His will, *sincerely, constantly, tenderly, readily, universally, absolutely, and perfectly*, praying to Him, that He may graciously forgive all our disobedience and cover all our imperfections and sinful obedience with the perfect and complete obedience of His Son, who fulfilled all righteousness in our place, Gal 2.15-16.
 - D. And, as we strive, in His strength, through Christ, to render the obedience He requires (*all His commandments, with all the heart, all the time*), let us take our encouragement from His promise that He gives us the grace to do as He commands, Ezk 36.27; Phil 2.12-13, and therefore not hold back our hands from *anything* we know to be His will.