

Recap

In a world that often equates freedom with unrestricted personal choice, there's a profound truth that many of us overlook: true freedom is found not in doing whatever we want, but in aligning our will with God's. This paradoxical wisdom is beautifully captured in Psalm 119:57-58:

"You are my portion, Lord; I have promised to obey your words. I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise."

These verses reveal a heart that has discovered the secret to genuine satisfaction and liberty. Let's explore what it means to make God our "portion" and how obedience to His Word leads to a life of fulfillment and purpose.

The Lord as Our Portion

The concept of God being our "portion" harkens back to the time when the Israelites were entering the Promised Land. While most tribes received land as their inheritance, the priestly tribe of Levi was given something far greater – God Himself as their portion. This idea evolved to represent anyone who desired God above all else, echoing the sentiment, "Yes, Your blessings are good Lord, but what I want more than anything else is You."

This attitude is exemplified in a powerful moment from Exodus. After the Israelites' rebellion with the golden calf, God offered to give them the bountiful land of Canaan but said He would not go with them. Moses' response is striking: "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). Moses understood that even the richest blessings are empty without God Himself.

The psalmist Asaph beautifully expressed this same heart in Psalm 73:25-26: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

When we truly make God our portion – our ultimate desire and satisfaction – it naturally leads to a resolve to obey His words. This obedience isn't grudging compliance, but a joyful response to love.

Helps for Obeying God

1. Resolve: The psalmist says, "I have promised to obey your words." This speaks of a firm decision made in advance, not waiting until temptation strikes. By verbally committing ourselves to obedience, we strengthen our resolve to resist making anything else our "portion."

2. God's Grace: While we make the choice to obey, we also desperately need God's empowering grace. That's why the psalmist continues, "be gracious to me according to your promise." We resolve to obey, but we rely on God's grace to follow through.

3. Love for God: Obedience flows naturally from a heart that loves God. It's not about reluctant submission, but a delight in conforming our lives to please the One we love. As 1 John 5:3 puts it, "This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome."

Hindrances to Obeying God

1. Worldly Understanding of Freedom: Our culture often defines freedom as the absence of constraints. However, Jesus taught that everyone is a slave to sin, and true freedom is found only through faith in Him – a faith that leads to joyful obedience. As the psalmist declares, "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts" (Psalm 119:45).

2. Cultural Relativism: The belief that there are no absolute standards of right and wrong can seep into Christian thinking, leading to passivity about obedience. We must remember that God's absolute standard of righteousness is what necessitated Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

3. Incomplete Understanding of Grace: Some mistakenly believe that being "under grace" means we're no longer obligated to obey God's moral law. However, while we're not justified by the law, true saving faith always leads

to obedience. As Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Practical Steps to Cultivate Obedience

To obey God's words, we must know them well. This requires more than just weekly exposure to Scripture. Jesus said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Just as we eat food daily, we need daily nourishment from God's Word.

Here are some tips for effective Bible reading:

1. Avoid "Easy" Bible Reading: Recognize that consistent Bible reading requires discipline and effort. As Paul told Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7).
2. Overcome Guilty Bible Reading: Remember, the Bible is designed to help sinners access God's grace. Don't let feelings of unworthiness keep you from God's Word.
3. Move Beyond Performance-Based Reading: Read the Bible to get more of God, not to feel better about yourself or to appease Him.
4. Engage Your Heart: When Bible reading feels mechanical, turn to Psalm 119 as a prayer guide to rekindle your love for Scripture.
5. Read in Community: We weren't meant to walk our faith journey alone. Surround yourself with others who share your love for God's Word, as the psalmist says, "I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts" (Psalm 119:63).

As we make God our portion and commit to obeying His Word, we discover a profound truth: obedience to God doesn't diminish our joy – it protects and increases it. We find ourselves truly free, no longer enslaved to fear, resentment, guilt, or the fickle demands of our culture.

In a world that often feels chaotic and unmoored, God's Word provides the perfect environment for us to thrive. Like a fish in water, we find our true element when we align our lives with His commands. As we discipline ourselves to read, meditate on, and obey Scripture, we grow in our love for God and experience the abundant life He promises.

Let us, like the psalmist, resolve to make God our portion and obey His words. In doing so, we'll discover the paradoxical truth that in surrendering our will to God, we find our truest selves and our greatest freedom.

- 1 Review what it means for God to be your "portion"? How is this concept different from simply viewing God as a source of blessings?
- 2 The psalmist made a resolute promise to obey God's words. How might making such a verbal commitment impact our daily walk with God? Have you ever made such a commitment?
- 3 How do we balance the concept of personal resolve to obey God with the need for God's grace to empower that obedience? Why are both necessary?
- 4 How would you explain the relationship between God's grace and obedience to someone who thinks being "under grace" means they don't need to follow God's commands? How might viewing God's commands as protective rather than restrictive change our attitude towards obedience?
- 5 Which of the four types of Bible reading to avoid (easy, guilty, performance, mechanical) do you struggle with most? Which of these do you struggle the most with and why? What could you do to change it?
- 6 The sermon mentions that obedience flows from love for God. How have you experienced this in your own life?

