



January 2013 - *To Know God is To Obey God*

In C.S. Lewis's spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, he describes how God led him from atheism, to theism, to eventual belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. One key in his journey to faith was his understanding that if there was a God, that human beings should obey God, not because of what He's done, but because of who He is. Lewis writes:

There are men, far better men than I, who have made immortality almost the central doctrine of their religion; but for my own part I have never seen how a preoccupation with that subject at the outset could fail to corrupt the whole thing. I had been brought up to believe that goodness was goodness only if it were disinterested, and that any hope of reward or fear of punishment contaminated the will. If I was wrong in this (the question is really much more complicated than I then perceived) my error was most tenderly allowed for. I was afraid that threats or promises would demoralise me; no threats or promises were made. The commands were inexorable, but they were backed by no "sanctions." God was to be obeyed simply because he was God. Long since, through the gods of Asgard, and later through the notion of the Absolute, He had taught me how a thing can be revered not for what it can do to us but for what it is in itself. That is why, though it was a terror, it was no surprise to learn that God is to be obeyed because of what He is in Himself. If you ask why we should obey God, in the last resort the answer is, "I am." To know God is to know that our obedience is due to Him. In his nature His sovereignty *de jure* is revealed.

Of course as I have said, the matter is more complicated than that. The primal and necessary Being, the Creator, has sovereignty *de facto* as well as *de jure*. He has the power as well as the kingdom and the glory. But the *de jure* sovereignty was made known to me before the power, the right before the might. And for this I am thankful. I think it is well, even now, sometimes to say to ourselves, "God is such that if (*per impossibile*) his power could vanish and His other attributes remain, so that the supreme right were forever robbed of the supreme might, we should still owe Him precisely the same kind and degree of allegiance as we now do..."¹

A good New Year's resolution might be to pray and ask God to help us better obey Him this year, not because of what He can do for us, but rather, because of Who He is. If this resolution is kept by the power of the Holy Spirit in us, then the coming year is certain to be full of great promise and joy.

Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

1 JOHN 2:4-6 (NIV)

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London: Fontana Books, 1959), pp. 184-185.