



How Do You Spell Love?

When one of my children was in third grade, she entered the county spelling bee. (To protect the guilty, I will, of course, not name the child!) She was well-prepared for the competition. Unfortunately, her first word was “dumbbell.”

As soon as the caller gave the word, I *knew* what was about to happen. I sat there thinking, “Double-b; double-b! Don’t leave out the second ‘b’!” But I cannot communicate telepathically. I helplessly listened as my unnamed child slowly recited, “Dumbbell. D-U-M-B-E-L-L. Dumbbell.” A word of advice to future spellers: NEVER misspell “dumbbell.” It sets you up for a lifetime of jokes about dumbbells.

Recently, I remembered this spelling bee as I read 1 John. One of the overarching themes in both John’s gospel and his epistles is love; God’s love for us, and our love for God and each other.

In 1 John, he gives us a test that helps answer the question, “Do I love God?” One way to know if we love God is this; “*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome*” (1 Jn 5:3).

John says that our obedience demonstrates our love for God. In God’s spelling bee, we spell love like this: “Love. O-B-E-Y. Love.” And God says, “Absolutely right!”

We tend to think of love purely on emotional terms. If we feel an emotional twinge when singing “I Love You, Lord,” we feel certain that we love God. But it is possible to sing Michael W. Smith’s “Deep in Love with Jesus” while living in willful disobedience to His Word. God sees our love in our decisions and actions. We show our love to God not by singing “Oh, How I Love Jesus,” but by obedience.

If we love God, our obedience will be willing obedience. John writes, “*And his commandments are not burdensome.*” There is begrudging obedience that is motivated by fear; “If I disobey, God will punish me.” Obedience that is motivated by love is willing and joyful; “I love God and I want to live in a way that pleases Him.”

Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” When Peter responded affirmatively, Jesus gave him an assignment, “Feed my sheep.” Imagine that Peter had replied, “I love you, but I won’t obey your command.” Impossible! Peter’s love for Jesus motivated his obedience to Jesus’ command. Peter spent the rest of his life obeying Jesus’ commission. He traveled through the Roman world preaching and feeding Jesus’ sheep. His love for Jesus inspired his obedience.

Do you love God? Does your daily obedience to God demonstrate that love?

How do you spell “love?” O-B-E-Y.