

FAITH TO OBEY

“His servants you are to whom you obey.”

By

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When Jesus was tempted, it was the written word of his Father, and his determination to obey it, that kept him from yielding and committing sin. He continuously preached obedience beginning with the Sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who says unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

To our collapsing culture obedience is a foreign word. George Barna did a survey of 152 separate items comparing the lost world and the churches, and he said there's virtually no difference between the two. Our speech is often more like that of the world, using the world's slang expressions referring to God and Jesus, and other speech that is far less than pure and edifying. We treat lightly the sins of gossip, anger, and bitterness, and forget that we are forgiven only as we forgive others.

Biblical commands with regard to modesty in dress have been discarded, in order to conform to the world's fashion of exposing as much of the body as the law allows. Come to think of it, I have never heard a sermon on 1st Timothy 2:9-10.

When something wrong has been done, it is now customary to turn to a counselor or psychologist to find some way to feel justified without obeying God.

Major denominations have annual debates over whether or not to accept homosexuals as leaders. Since God's law on the subject is clearly spelled out, it is obvious that a great many members of these churches have no interest in obeying God. In fact, David Wilkerson, in his book, *America's Last Call*, says that the sin of America has outdone every other generation, including that of Noah's day, Sodom and Gomorrah, and any other time in history.

Current popular theology has allowed the fact of God's grace to crowd out the necessity of obedience. It says that since we are saved by grace, nothing is to be done for salvation except to say a little prayer and invite Jesus into your heart, a suggestion not found anywhere in scripture. The first command of Jesus was “Repent! That’s something to do, and it means to turn from one's own way to obey God. While it is true that there is no way one can earn salvation by works — by His grace, God saves us through the death of His son - - it is also true that saving faith produces works of obedience. True faith motivates one to keep God's commandments out of love for God, a faith that is working through love (Gal.5:6).

Paul asked, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.” He then explained that in baptism the old man is crucified with Jesus, that we should no longer serve sin, but “live unto God.” Then he asked, “What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know you not, that to whom you present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. But thanks be to God that whereas you were servants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of doctrine which was delivered to you; and being made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:1-6, 15-18).

So a Christian is one who seeks to obey God and thus be a servant of righteousness. In these days of rancid moral corruption, sexual depravity, and greed, Christians should stand in stark contrast to the world in general. But unfortunately – tragically – the truth of George Barna's report puts us to shame.

Why do we sometimes find it so hard to obey? Perhaps it is because “stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (Prov. 9:17). Jesus recognized that sometimes “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41). James wrote that “in many things we all stumble” (James 3:2). John wrote (to Christians) that if we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:7).

For such failures God's grace is still available for His children. “If we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). It may be that our pride will not permit us to let go of our own control to submit to Him. Or do we fear being criticized as being fanatic, old fashioned, politically incorrect, or religious nuts?

In the case of Adam and Eve they had more confidence in Satan's insidious lie than they had in God. Often that which the world offers appears to be a much better deal than what one can see as the consequence of obeying God.

King Saul was commanded to destroy all the herds of the enemy, but he couldn't see the point in getting rid of all that valuable livestock, so he overruled the command of God, and lost his kingdom and his life. It is easy to rationalize that we can serve God better by making concessions to the world and its demands.

Today's “church growth” experts would have us find out what pleases the crowd, then incorporate that into the church. Heaven help the preacher in the trendy church who follows Paul's advice to Timothy to “reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2).

John wrote that God's commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3); but evidently they are too many people, who make a great effort to avoid them. It is hard to obey a law that one despises, but when convinced that it is beneficial, it becomes natural to comply with it. King David, like many of us, learned through his own sinful experience that the laws

of God were given for man's own good. Then he could sing, "The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul" (Psalm 119:7).

So it comes down to a matter of faith. Do we believe that God's law and the commandments of Jesus actually provide the very best direction? Did Jesus tell the truth when he said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things (necessities of life) shall be added unto you" (Matt 6:33)? Can we have faith that to reject the fashion of the world is the best way to serve God, according to Paul in Romans 12:1-2?

When we have faith that all God's ways are better than any of the ways man can devise, then His commandments cease to be grievous, and we can sing with the psalmist, "Oh how love I thy law!....How sweet are thy words to my taste" (Psalm 119:97, 103).

Jesus didn't obey God out of fear of punishment, nor self-interest. His obedience did not gain the esteem of his peers, nor even of his own family. Nor was it out of loyalty to any party or to the government. He obeyed because he delighted in pleasing the Father. "I do always the things that are pleasing to my heavenly Father" (John 8:29). It was his primary goal and desire throughout his life. "I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 5:30).

Millions of people take medication daily in order to soothe minds that are troubled by anxiety, anger, hatred, covetousness, and guilt. While the medication may reduce the symptoms, the only way to perfect peace is through obedience to God. "Great peace have they that love thy law, and they have no occasion of stumbling" (Psalm 119:165). By contrast, "The way of the transgressor is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

There can be no peace in the human heart as long as one is operating contrary to the Creator's instructions. God's way is the only right way, and therefore the only way to peace. His express purpose is to bring our every thought and action into harmony with his will, and when this happens there is a peace of mind that the world cannot take away. We are to surrender any other purpose – riches, security, comfort, man's praise, even life itself if necessary – in order to do His will.

Does the Lord demand perfect obedience? It is the experience of every devout Christian, that the better we get to know God the more clearly we see how we have failed and come short of perfect obedience, and have all the more reason to give thanks for His grace. But this is far different than the times past when we knew full well that we were disobedient.

And, obedience to exactly which laws? It isn't clear to everyone how some scriptures are to be applied. Some debate over whether or not a woman must wear hat in church, or exactly how one must observe a day of rest. According to Paul, when in doubt, we are to follow our conscience in faith (Rom. 14). But there is no debate over matters of honesty, justice, charity, and the plain teachings of Jesus. One knows very well whether he is living after Jesus' example to please God, or living to please himself.

“He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

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