

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO OBEDIENCE?

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One of the first songs I learned after becoming a Christian was *Trust and Obey*:

*When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His word
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey*

(J.H. Sammis & D.B. Towner).

The two words—*trust and obey*—aren't very popular in our day; especially obey. Like so many other virtues in our society and churches, the word *obey* is consigned to the ancient attitude of "Nobody tells me what to do." Disobedience is rampant in our classrooms, on our streets, in our churches, in our families, in business dealing, etc. We live in an age where promises are made to be broken.

What is *obedience*? Yes, I know it is a dumb question to ask. Why? Because everyone knows the meaning of obedience. Do they? *Webster* defines *obedience* as: "*Compliance with an order, request, or law or submission to another's authority; compliance.*"

Everyday life is filled with orders requiring obedience. The teacher enters the classroom and says, "Now everyone be quiet and write down what I am about to say." We come to an intersection we normally drive straight through but a policeman directs us to take a detour. A father tells his son that he cannot go out and play until he completes his homework. The song leader says, "Let's stand and sing number 702." We realize that the first three examples—the teacher, policeman, and father—many times are argued with or rejected, creating conflict.

Whatever happened to obedience?

Contributors to Obedience

The study of obedience is an interesting study. Obedience is a reflection of the socially acceptable norms in a society. In my studies and observations I have discovered there are several major contributors to a person being obedient:

1. People are obedient out of respect for the source of the order or for respect for the person in authority giving the command.
2. People are obedient because they are afraid of the consequences of disobeying. It may be tied to the belief there will be a takeover of one's country if war is not engaged in.
3. People are obedient because of the perceived or tangible benefits promised to them if they obey. It's the "what's in it for me?" attitude.
4. People are obedient because the group they are members of advocate obedience to certain rules and directives. They don't want to be viewed as odd or rebellious.
5. People obey because of ignorance. They have accepted, without verifying, certain propositions or statements that aren't true and many times turn out to be harmful.
6. People are obedient because they understand the reasons, benefits, and sensibleness of obedience. It's the right thing to do.
7. People are obedient because they had rather not create controversy by asking questions or challenging certain orders or demands.

Can you think of an additional reason why people are obedient?

Obedience usually occurs when you are told to do something by someone in authority; conformity usually happens as a result of social or peer pressure: everybody is doing it. Adolf Eichmann was executed in 1962 for his role in the Holocaust, in which six million Jewish people, as well as others were murdered by Nazi Germany. Eichmann was declared sane by six psychiatrists. How could a sane man do such terrible crimes? Eichmann wrote in his jail diary why: *"The orders were, for me, the highest thing in my life and I had to obey them without question"* (Extract quoted in the *Guardian*, 12 August 1999, p. 13). In his mind he was only be obedient!

Jesus warned about BLIND obedience to the Pharisees of His day: *"Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch"* (Matthew 15:14). Religious and spiritual blindness has eternal consequences.

The Blessing of Obedience

Obedience is important for numerous reasons. The Hebrews' writer takes us to what, in my opinion, is the number one reason for obedience: He wrote: *"[T]hough He was a Son, yet He*

learned OBEDIENCE by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who OBEY Him” (Hebrews 5:8, 9). This is clear. Eternal salvation is based on obedience. Nothing is more important than this (cf. Mark 8:36-38).

The motivation for obedience is not fear, coercion, or shame but LOVE. Jesus said, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15),* and *“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).* We respond to God’s love for us (cf. John 3:16).

The Action of Obedience

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (cf. Romans 1:14-16). What is the Gospel? Paul answers this question: *“Moreover, brethren, I declared to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you FIRST of all that which I received: that Christ DIED for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was BURIED, and that He ROSE again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).*

The death, burial and resurrection of Christ are physical and historical facts. The question now is, how do you obey facts? Paul gives us the answer. In Romans 6:1-16 the apostle reminds the Romans how they embraced the Gospel—death, burial and resurrection—which was duplicated by them in immersion (baptism). In 6:17 he wrote, *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you OBEYED from the heart that FORM of doctrine to which you were delivered.”*

The Greek word for *FORM* is *tupos* and means *“type, impress.”* A good way to understand *tupos* is relating it to what happens when a Notary Seal is applied to a document. The imprint on the metal seal, not the seal itself, is impressed on the paper. In obeying the Gospel a person doesn’t literally die, isn’t literally buried, and literally raised from the dead. In baptism a dead spiritual person dies to sin, is buried and raised to *“walk in newness of life.”*

Consequences of Disobedience

The consequences of disobedience could fill volumes. The major one being to miss heaven and eternal life. In Revelation 22:14 we read, *“Blessed are those who DO HIS COMMANDMENTS, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”*

The Galatians were warned by Paul concerning the danger of drifting away from the Gospel (Galatians 1:6-10). In Galatians 3:1 he wrote this: *“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified.”* Since Adam and Eve, Satan has been trying to trick us into disobeying God.

When the Christians were ordered to stop preaching the Gospel (Acts 5:27, 28), here is how the Apostles responded: *“But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to OBEY God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29).* Regardless, we *“seek the kingdom first” (Matthew 6:33).*

Quick-check Relative to Obedience

Whatever happened to obedience?

How are you intentionally obeying the Word of God relative to some practices that enhance your spiritual growth in Christ? On a **scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being excellent**, indicate your level of obedience to the following practices:

- __1. Attending the assembly (Hebrews 10: 25).
- __2. Studying the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV).
- __3. Praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- __4. Helping those in need (James 1:27).
- __5. Encouraging fellow-members of the Body of Christ (Hebrews 10:24).
- __6. Faithful stewardship (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2).
- __7. Thinking on spiritual virtues (Philippians 4:7-9).
- __8. Sharing the Gospel (Mark 16:15, 16).

Whatever happened to obedience in YOUR life?