

Chapter 6

SHAPING LIVES THROUGH OBEDIENCE

What is most likely to prevent us from living “life at its best”? Possibly the biggest obstacle we face is obedience. By nature, we are arrogant and vain people; therefore, obedience is not a natural response. As we focus more on pleasing ourselves, we lose the desire to do what pleases God, which is to obey Him. Christ, quoting David, the psalmist, said, “. . .with burnt offerings and sin offerings You were not pleased. Then I said, ‘ . . .I have come to do Your will, O God’ ” (Hebrews 10:6-7). Doing God’s will, being obedient to Him, is what pleases God. It sounds simple enough, but, in reality, we find our words, thoughts, and actions are often contrary to God’s will. The writer to the Hebrews wrote about what is necessary for us to please God: “*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him*” (Hebrews 11:6).

The basis of obedience to God, then, is faith in Him. Faith is what makes obedience possible. Throughout Hebrews 11, the “Faith Chapter,” the writer makes it clear that all the “heroes of faith” he mentions were able to be obedient because they believed in God, Whom they knew to be faithful. Thus, when we talk about obedience, we must be aware that faith is the foundation.

Faith is more than a belief in God. It is a way of life. Heroes of faith, although imperfect, trusted God and gave their lives to Him, as this chapter points out. Faith is the belief, placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, that God is real, and that He is good, and that the One who made it all hasn’t left it all. He still sends light into the shadows and responds to our obedience in faith. Because of faith, we believe that God will do what is right, and that He is always present to help. By telling about the faith of Old Testament characters, Hebrews Chapter 11 is an encouragement to us to be obedient. In obedience, what are we doing to encourage others?

Failure to obey God is sin and rebellion. Obedience is our faithful response to God because, as redeemed children, our minds and hearts are open to God’s love, mercy, and grace. As the Holy Spirit does His work of sanctification in us, He causes us to surrender our will to God’s will, and obedience begins. We are



given spiritual strength to do what we know we should do and power not to do what we know we should not do. The power to obey resides in God, not in us. Paul reminds us that God’s resources are vast: *“I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being”* (Ephesians 3:16).

Scripture is very clear on the importance of obedience to the Lord. Jesus said, *“If you love Me, you will obey what I command”* (John 14:15). God’s Word also shares the promises of special blessings to those who are faithful and obedient to the Lord. Moses challenges us,

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).



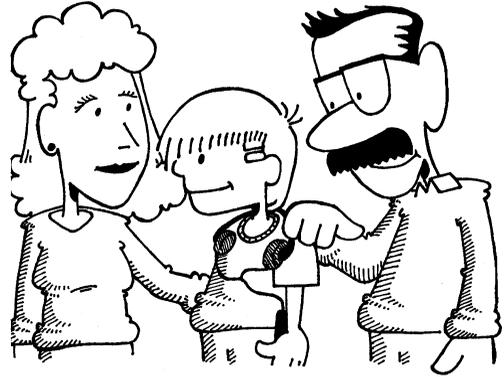
Obedience to our heavenly Father is paramount, but it is also important that we obey all civil laws and parental guidelines. *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves . . .do what is right and he will commend you . . .But if you do wrong, be afraid . . .it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience”* (Romans 13:1-5).

God considers obedience to parents of utmost importance. The fourth commandment orders, *“Honor your father and your mother,”* and adds an incentive, *“so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you”* (Exodus 20:12). Deuteronomy 27:16 speaks to the problem of disobedience to parents: *“Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother.”*

Early in life, we recognize the rewards we receive from obeying our parents. Teenage children are likely to receive later curfews and attend more events when they are obedient to their parents. They may even earn more car privileges when they listen to and obey their parents’ instructions. In addition to special rewards, obedient children are apt to enjoy a more harmonious relationship with their families, as well as greater respect from them. We can also remember experiencing as children consequences for disobedience such as grounding, losing phone privileges, or being confined to our rooms for a period of time. Children should obey their fathers and mothers because God commands it and because they

love and respect them, but the desire for independence often causes poor choices and results in tough consequences.

Generally speaking, the lives of children are rather stable, harmonious, fulfilling, and enjoyable when there is a willingness to obey parents. Most parents react with more kindness, respect, and generosity to children who accept and obey the rules set by their parents. Children receive a much different reaction from their parents when they become disobedient. During these times, life can become unpleasant. The unpleasantness is likely to persist and develop into a source of great emotional and spiritual distress if the disobedience lingers.



Are there similarities between how our heavenly Father reacts to faithful obedience and how our earthly fathers do? As God's people, we know that He is a God of love Who will never stop loving us. God wants the best for us; however, He knows the only way we can receive His best is through obedience. Everything God asks of us is for our good. When we honor and obey God, He will abide in us and generously bless us. Through the salvation Jesus gives us, we are made perfectly fit for the purpose of God. Our responsibility is to live in obedience to Him. Exodus 19:5 reads, "*Now if you obey Me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.*" This makes it clear that our heavenly Father is pleased by our obedience, and God's favor rests on us as an act of pure grace and mercy.

When we accept God's will for us and respond in obedience, we live in harmony with Him. In the same way, we do well in life when we comply with authority that we are obligated to respect. Roger Staubach, who, as a quarterback, led the Dallas Cowboys to the World Football Championship in 1971, was never allowed to call his own plays. He was told when to throw and run. It was a trial for Roger Staubach to accept this situation even when the plays came from such a respected coach as Tom Landry. Roger felt he was able to run his own team. A harmonious relationship developed between the two men when Roger was able to come to grips with the issue of obedience.

Obedience through faith is the key to joy or despair. Through obedience we will enjoy a relationship with the Lord and its accompanying peace and joy. Disobedience without repentance and a change of heart causes separation from Christ. ". . .God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 5:6). With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to see the wisdom in living a life of faithful obedience. With His help, we will understand the foolishness of choosing to turn away from God through disobedience.

Our willing obedience to Christ reveals the depth of our faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, wrote, “But the Christ Whom the Scriptures proclaim is in every word He utters One Who grants faith to those only who obey Him.” He also said, “Obedience to the call of Jesus never lies within our power . . . the step into the situation where faith is possible is not an offer which we can make to Jesus but always His gracious offer to us.”¹ Only in our obedience through faith will God reveal His full nature to us. Oswald Chambers wrote, “We may read some things in the Bible every day for a year and they may mean nothing to us. Then, because we have been obedient to God in some small detail, we suddenly see what God means and His nature is instantly opened up to us!”² For us to be able to maintain an intimate relationship with Christ, we need to rely on God’s strength in His Word and Sacrament so we will not disobey Him in thought, word, or deed. “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*” (Matthew 5:8).

The greatest motivating force for obedience is love and trust in the Lord and thanksgiving for His unconditional love. Do our thoughts and actions reflect a love for the Lord? Rather than drifting through the motions of life, are we active in our service and obedience? Oswald Chambers said, “The best measure of the spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience.” Richard Baxter wrote:

Lord, it belongs not to my care, whether I die or live,
To love and serve Thee is my share, and this Thy grace must give.
If life be long, I will be glad that I may long obey:
If short, yet why should I be sad to soar to endless day?³

CHOOSING SELF CAUSES DISOBEDIENCE

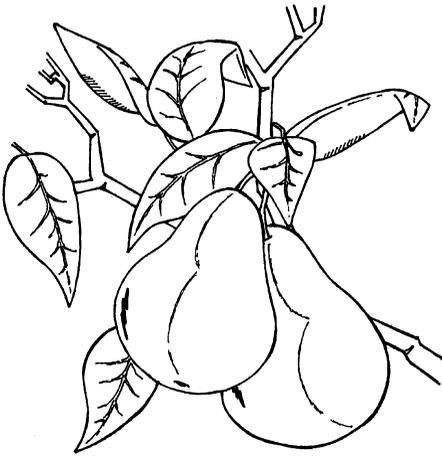
There is a remarkable contrast between the two four-letter words “obey” and “self.” Only with God’s help can we be obedient. Through faith, we acknowledge that life is doomed unless it is yielded to the complete control of Christ. The surrendering of self to God is contrary to the prevailing attitude of our society. This attitude promotes looking out for “number one.” We are told by those around us that we should do and have whatever makes us happy. Without Christ there is no hope or future, so today is as good as it is going to get. We are told to enjoy life now, because we are not certain about tomorrow. With continued disobedience, life will come to a dead end. If we don’t humble ourselves before God, we elevate the status of self, which disregards God’s input. Disobedience, with self in control, causes a perpetual state of sin and distancing from Christ. Romans 2:8



warns, “*But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*” The cost of obedience is nothing compared with the cost of disobedience.⁴

We are all obedient to someone. Romans 6:16 asks, “*Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?*” If we give our obedience to the wrong person or cause, we will live without God’s peace and joy, leaving us with empty and unfulfilled lives ending in death. Obedience through faith is requisite for fellowship with God.

God expects our love and obedience. “*If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed My Father’s commands and remain in His love*” (John 15:10). Jesus will not leave us or forsake us, but, when we choose to



disobey, we remove ourselves from the relationship He has created for us. We read in verse 14, “*You are my friends if you do what I command.*” The fruit of obedience is a result of the relationship believers have with Christ as He, the Vine, provides nourishment to us, the branches (John 15:5). Christ’s abiding in us and we in Him is our power source to living obediently. By ourselves, we are incapable of being obedient. “*No branch can bear fruit by itself*” (John 15:4). The fruit of obedience comes from being connected just as branches are connected to a vine. Only because we are

connected to Jesus, Who is the Vine, can we be obedient. When we obey, follow, and serve Christ, we will become more like Him. “*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did*” (1 John 2:6).

The words “obey” and “self” imply opposing directions whereas the words “obey” and “faith” are connected. When we have we faith, we obey. The way to spell faith is o-b-e-y. God wants us to be like obedient children who obey their fathers. He wants to develop in us obedient and submissive spirits, like Christ’s.

Often our disobedience to the Lord is not done consciously and deliberately. We disobey because we aren’t listening to Him. God gives us His commands, but we pay no attention to them. In this way, indifference, rather than hatred, is shown to



be the antithesis of love. We may not be acting in willful disobedience. When we demonstrate our lack of total commitment and love, it is as if we had never known God. Joshua 22:5 instructs, *“But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to obey His commands, to hold fast to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.”*

When we do not keep God’s commandments we show God disrespect, and we should be filled with regret and shame. To obey God is not an option but a Gospel-imperative. *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). God patiently waits for us to see His truth so that we will desire to live our lives in obedience to Him. From Edward Osler we read:

May we Your precepts, Lord, fulfill
And do on earth our Father’s will
As angels do above;
Still walk in Christ, the living way,
With all Your children and obey
The law of Christian love.⁵

BEGINNING OF DISOBEDIENCE

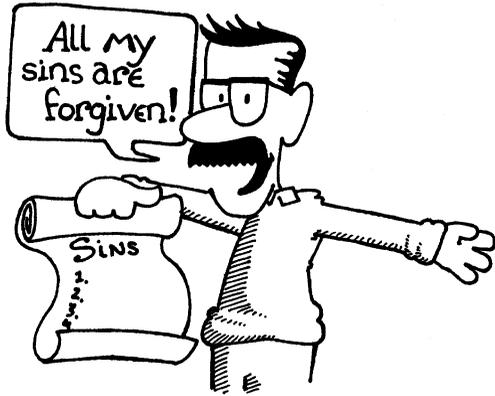
“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground’” (Genesis 1:26). Man was created to have dominion over God’s creation. There was happiness in the Garden of Eden until disobedience occurred. Satan tempted Eve until she chose to be disobedient. Genesis 3:6 records, *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”* Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve experienced a separation from God, and, for the first time, they were fearful and insecure. Disharmony ruled in Eden’s Garden. They were in disharmony with their Creator, with each other, and with God’s creation.

While obedient, Adam and Eve lived in dominion over all things. Because of their disobedience, they lost their mastery over creation. What God had given them would have been secure if they had remained obedient. Disobedience changed Adam and Eve from being masters over the earth to vulnerable, weak people, susceptible to Satan’s grasp.

Eating the forbidden fruit changed the future of mankind. Beginning with Adam and Eve, man has had to struggle between right and wrong, good and evil,

Christ and Satan. The coming of Christ gives us all new hope, because, through Christ's obedience to His heavenly Father, He is the new Master of all things.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:8-11).



During his thirty-plus years on earth, Jesus never once succumbed to temptations, but always remained true to His Father. “*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will*

be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). Jesus came to earth to make amends for our disobedience. He lived a perfect life so He could be the perfect sacrifice! He went to the cross obediently to pay the price for our disobedience.

A disobedient person who continuously acts in sin makes a faith relationship impossible. To repeat the same sin over and over again without a change is rebellion against God. A rebel seeks his own will rather than God's will. In 1 Samuel 15:23a, the prophet tells King Saul, “*For rebellion is like the sin of divination [witchcraft].*” God does not take disobedience lightly.

Before we can learn proper obedience, we must confess and be cleansed of past disobedience. “*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:8-9). When, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we place our sins in the hands of Christ with repentant hearts, Jesus will wipe clean our past disobedience and restore our relationship with Him. This is the only option Christ has given us for forgiveness of sins. He is waiting for us to cast all of our cares on Him. Psalm 103:12 gives us God's promise: “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*” “*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit*” (John 3:6). When Christ abides in us, we desire to be His obedient children.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What pleases God (Hebrews 11:6)? It is _____ that makes obedience possible.
2. What warning is found in Romans 2:8?
3. What enables you to show the fruit of obedience (John 15:4-5)?
4. Adam and Eve were obedient to God, then became disobedient. Contrast their lives before and after the fall (Genesis 3).
5. What did Christ's obedience do for you?

REPROOFS

By nature, we are bent toward willfulness and disobedience. We want to do things our own way. We are able to counteract our tendencies and learn to be responsive and obedient to God's calling through the power of His Spirit Who lives in us and works in us through Word and Sacrament.

"Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (Romans 8:8-9a). God brings wisdom into our lives through reproofs. God's nudges or proddings tell us when we've done something wrong. Listening to God's reproofs prompts us to correct our ways and keeps us from further error. When we resist God's wisdom, we lose. Proverbs 3:11-12 admonishes, *"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent His rebuke [reproof], because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in."* Solomon also writes, *"For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life, keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife" (Proverbs 6:23-24).*

We can live "life at its best" when we willingly accept God's discipline, which will put us in the direction He wants us to go. Why do we ignore what we believe are God's reproofs? From the wisdom of Proverbs, we find the following four reasons that reproofs are refused:

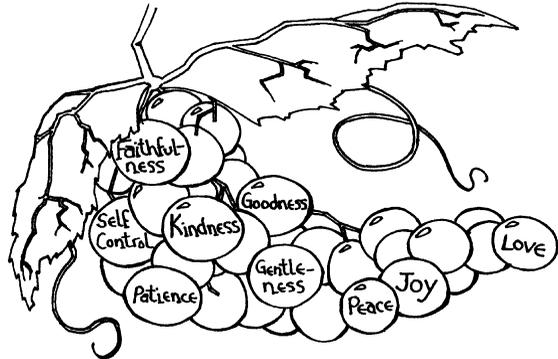
1. Stubbornness: *"But since you rejected Me when I called. . ."* (Proverbs 1:24). God is calling, but stubbornly we reject His call. Not to obey God's calling will put us on the path to live life at its worst, instead of "life at its best."
2. Inattentiveness: *" . . .and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand"* (Proverbs 1:24). We may be more prone to dullness of mind than stubbornness.

God is trying to reach us, but are we paying attention to His call? By not being attentive, we will miss God's reproofs for us.

3. Indifference: “. . . *you ignored all my advice . . .*” (Proverbs 1:25). God's reproofs do not reach us when we are unconcerned or apathetic about listening to Him. We need to care about wanting God to direct our lives.
4. Defensiveness: “. . . *and would not accept my rebuke*” (Proverbs 1:25). When we are too consumed with making excuses for ourselves, we are too proud to yield to God. When we are defensive, we become unwilling to consent to God's reproofs.⁶ If all of us could spend five seconds in hell, we would be less defensive and more eager to accept instruction.

OBEDIENCE: PATHWAY TO BLESSINGS

Connected to Christ, as branches to the vine, we are enabled to live obedient lives. Scripture makes some exciting promises to those who love and obey Him. In John 15:5, the Savior declared, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”* The life we lead will depend on our relationship with Jesus. When He lives within us, we receive His strength to serve and obey Him. When He abides in us, the love of the Lord will be seen through us. *“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you”* (John 15:7). When Christ dwells within us, God will pour out His blessings upon us.



The blessings of God are given to those who love and obey Him; the curse of God will be on those who are disobedient. Some of God's blessings or curses, depending on obedience or disobedience, are recorded in Deuteronomy, chapter 28: *“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God”* (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). The next twelve verses share God's blessings to the obedient. Verse fifteen is the first of **fifty-three verses** relating to God's curses for



disobedience: *“However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, **all these curses** will come upon you and overtake you.”*

As we face decisions, we need to remember the far-reaching consequences our choices will have. We can choose curses by disobedience, or we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, choose a blessed life by obedience. An old adage says, “We make decisions, and then our decisions turn around and make us.”

We live in a broken and rebellious generation. The obvious question, of course, is why? Many think the answer is confusing, but it is not. It is found throughout the record of Scripture; it is disobedience. How can we be obedient? We must learn, by the Spirit’s power working within us through Word and Sacrament, to be obedient to Christ in the details of daily life. We rely on Jesus’ words, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Our strength to obey lies in our weakness, for then we are more keenly aware of our need to stay connected to our Vine.

When we choose to do wrong, we have to suffer the consequences of disobedience. When we do right, it is by the Holy Spirit’s power that we choose. . .

- good over evil.
- blessings over curses.
- obedience over disobedience.
- harmony over disharmony.

We are predestined for good. When we choose evil, it leads us to our damnation.

Most of us see the wisdom in obeying the laws and regulations of our country, states, counties, and cities. If a highway sign reads, “Dangerous Curve Ahead,” are we going to obey and heed its warning? The consequences could be severe if we ignore the warning and maintain our speed, or if we choose to oppose the warning by speeding up. The road sign exists for the benefit of us all, but drivers can choose to obey or disobey road signs. In the same way, we have the freedom to obey or disobey God’s message and accept the appropriate blessings or curses.

OBEYING GOD

With the Holy Spirit working within us through God’s Word and Sacrament, we will obey even when it seems to go against our own experience and judgment. We find an example of this in the book of Luke. *“When He [Jesus] had finished speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because You say so, I will let down the nets”* (Luke 5:4-5).

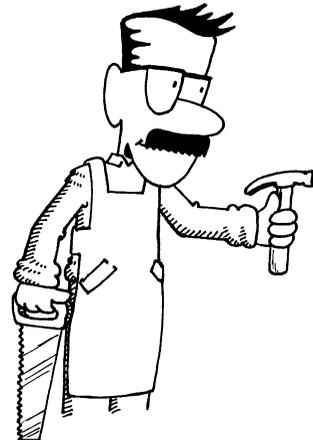


Peter obeyed, even though he felt that to go out into deeper water to find fish would be foolish. Peter obeyed, and, through his obedience, God blessed him and others with more fish than they ever thought possible. Jesus has the same power for miracles in our lives. He will look to us for faithful obedience. He expects it of His children!

Sometimes obedience simply requires waiting. More often, though, it seems that we are asked to make a move of some kind, such as:

- Noah picked up a hammer (Genesis 6).
- Moses climbed a mountain (Exodus 24).
- Joshua marched around Jericho seven days in a row (Joshua 6).
- Rahab hung a scarlet cord out her window (Joshua 2).

At times, the things the Lord asks us to do appear foolish to us, as they did to Naaman (2 Kings 5), and sometimes they're simple, as with the crippled beggar (Acts 3:7-8). Then, again, sometimes they're acts of great courage, as in the case of Stephen (Acts 6-7).



It may be a lot easier to do what God asks us than to face the consequences of not doing it. God created us with a free will, which allows us to choose to obey or disobey. Although He does not force us to do what He wants, God does provide consequences for our lack of submission to Him (Numbers 20:12, 1 Samuel 15:23).

Once the life of Christ has been implanted in us through His redemption, we will recognize God's right to absolute authority over us. Hearing and reading God's Word will take on new meaning and significance. *"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:6). God is not a taskmaster, but rather desires that we submit willingly to His authority. A willingness to obey God's will is essential for knowing God's will.

Take the case of Abraham, who was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. Without understanding what God's will was, he was willing to obey because he trusted God. The reward was God's promise, *" . . .that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you . . ."* (Genesis

22:16-17) “It is through the discipline of obedience that [we] get to the place where Abraham was and [we] see Who God is” (Oswald Chambers).

In the book of Numbers, God shows the connection among faith, obedience, and life. Because the people of Israel became discouraged and spoke against God, He sent venomous snakes among them. *“They bit the people and many Israelites died”* (Numbers 21:6b). On behalf of the people, Moses sought God, Who gave them a remedy against the bite of the snakes. He commanded Moses to make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole in sight of all the people. *“Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live”* (Numbers 21:8b). The faith and obedience of Moses and the Israelites gave them life. God could have easily eliminated the snakes, but he wanted the people to acknowledge their need, admit their helplessness, and put their trust in His power. Looking to the bronze image was an expression of faith and obedience. We look to Christ lifted up on the cross and live. This is our expression of faith and obedience (John 3:14-15).

COMPLETE OBEDIENCE

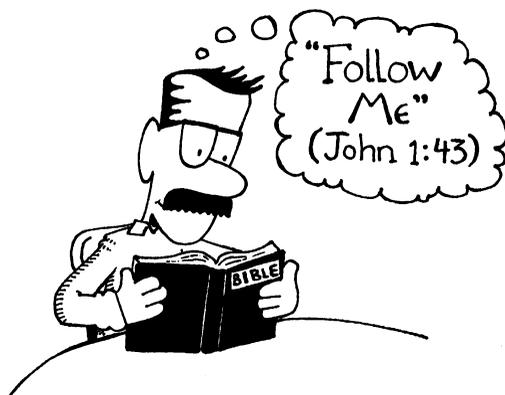
Do we carry out God’s commands, or do we modify His Word to suit our preferences or our timing? Delayed obedience is disobedience. Is our understanding of obedience the same as God’s? If we truly love and trust the Lord, we will not hesitate to do what He says. By waiting, we show that something or someone is in competition with Christ. That someone could easily be ourselves.

An example of partial obedience is found in 1 Samuel 15:1-29, where we find the Lord’s instructions to King Saul: *“Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”*

God had judged the Amelekites, and, as the messenger of doom, Saul was not to let anyone or anything escape.

By sparing the king and keeping the best animals, Saul was disobedient. God expected exact and full obedience, so Saul was removed from the throne of Israel. Saul had not listened to the word of God, so the Lord rejected him. *“Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king”* (1 Samuel 15:23b). Saul had incurred God’s curse.

Because King Saul had disobeyed, God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David as King. In these verses from 1 Samuel fifteen, we see that God does not see

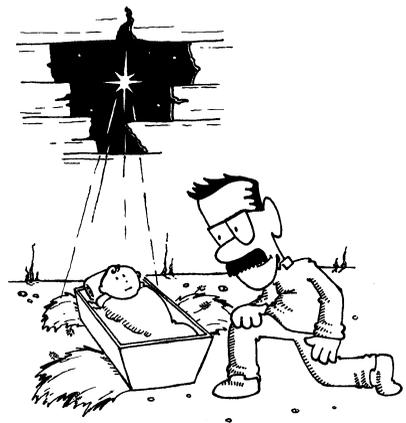


or judge in the same way that humans do. People look at the outside activities, appearance, or qualifications. God looks at the heart. He evaluates our inner disposition and character.

God is looking for wholehearted obedience down to the minutest detail. God does not want grudging obedience; He seeks from us obedience that springs from thankful hearts. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we must choose to obey the Lord completely. It is tempting to justify our sinful behavior by rationalizing that what we are doing is really not that important to God. It is also easy to find others who are doing worse things. We need to stop making excuses and give God our complete obedience. God's strength, imparted to us by Word and Sacrament, makes our obedience possible. *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power"* (Ephesians 6:10).

Complete obedience will come at a cost. It may cost us money, time, comforts, or friendships. Is obeying God important enough for us to have our friends drop us because we follow God's ways, not the world's? Are we willing to obey God's calling when He directs us to help others when we would prefer doing something else? *"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me"* (Luke 9:23). The significance of Jesus' asking people to deny themselves and follow Him is staggering. We can imagine that this command caused quite a stir among the disciples. What is our reaction?

Through His work on the Cross, Christ has made a life of obedience possible for us. His obedience was complete, including death on that Cross. That obedience gives us hope, strength, and life. Paul tells us in Romans 5:19, *"For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Christ] the many will be made righteous."* It is Christ's perfect obedience that makes our obedience holy and acceptable to the Lord. Because Christ lived the perfect, obedient life in our places, we have hope. Apart from a close relationship with Him, any attempts at obedience will fail. God's presence gives us the strength we need to be obedient. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can obey.



ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

LIFE-ENRICHING

Obedience

LIFE-DESTROYING

Disobedience

Life at its Best

Humility	Vanity
Trusting in God	Trusting in self
Accepting authority	Rejecting authority
Being responsible	Being irresponsible
Self-surrender	Self-promotion
Accepting God's commandments	Seeking to satisfy self
Following God	Rebelling against God
Repentant	Self-righteous
Abiding in Christ	Maintaining independence
Affirming God's way	Insisting on own way

WRAPPING UP

Faith is the foundation for obedience, and obedience is faith in action. Just as Christ was faithful to His heavenly Father, He wants us to show our faith and obedience. We are to have faith that says, *"Yet not what I will, but what You will"* (Mark 14:36b), and faith that wants to do God's will more than anything in our lives. Revelation 2:10b promises, *"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

To be obedient is seldom the easiest or most attractive path to follow. We are by nature very selfish and sinful, so obedience comes with difficulty. In addition to our own nature, the world and the devil pull at us constantly to follow their ways. We need to stay on guard at all times and seek God's strength and wisdom so we can stay faithful to our calling. By our own power, we are not capable of being obedient, but through the Holy Spirit we have the source of energy. *"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,"* is God's promise to us (Zechariah 4:6b) that He will equip us to live "life at its best."

Our motivation for obedience comes from the Cross and empty tomb. We strive to be obedient out of thanks for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. When we remain faithful and obedient to God's Word, we will hear God say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21a).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. How did Noah show his obedience (Genesis 6:14, 22)?
How did Moses show his obedience (Exodus 24:12-13)?

How did Joshua show his obedience (Joshua 6:1-21)?

How did Samuel show his obedience (1 Samuel 3:9-10)?

2. What was Abraham willing to do to obey God (Genesis 15:1-16:6)?
3. What did the descendants of Noah do in defiance of God and what was God's reaction (Genesis 9:1; 10:32-11:9)?
4. Give a Biblical example in which obedience brought a blessing and disobedience a judgment. Do you have a personal example?
5. Why did God give us the Ten Commandments?
6. How did King Saul disobey God (1 Samuel 15)?
7. God demands _____ obedience
Obedience=Life
Disobedience=_____
8. What is the difference between performance and obedience?
9. What does Romans 6:16-18 mean?
10. Why do you obey God? Why is your obedience important to God?
11. Why is obedience difficult? What are your obstacles?
12. Do you know someone who is a model of obedience in some way?
13. What will happen when you are obedient to the Lord (John 15:10)?
14. Those who are disobedient will see God's _____(Ephesians 5:6)?
15. What are reproofs?

Notes:

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 84.

² Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), November 17.

³ Richard Baxter, "Lord, It Belongs not to My Care," (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978).

⁴ May Dawson. "At Thy Word I Will . . ." *Herald of His Coming*. (Newton, Kansas, March, 1994), 4.

⁵ Edward Osler. "May We Your Precepts, Lord, Fulfill." *Lutheran Worship*. (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 389.

⁶ Charles R. Swindoll. *Living Beyond the Daily Grind*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1988), 164-167.