

The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1: 5 & 16:26

*“...Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name’s sake. **Rom. 1:4-5***

*“But now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;” **Rom. 16:26***

Introduction:

Scripture reveals a progressive revelation concerning God’s will regarding obedience. As we move through the time line of God revealing his will to us we see the kind of obedience that honors God and the sacrifice of his Son for our disobedience.

The Old Covenant (OT)

Obedience in the Old Testament is based on fear of retribution. It is an obedience to avoid God’s displeasure or even His wrath.

There is a problem here; obedience that springs forth from the well of fear, or duty only lasts as long as the fear lasts. Fear is a motive, but it is inadequate to change a heart. When the fear is gone-so is the obedience.

Illustration: it is like a child’s obedience done for fear of being caught or punished. Once out from under the thumb of the punisher (parents) the child will rebel. He never “owned” the obedience, he only owned the fear of punishment.

Secondly, the fear of the Lord, brings genuine guilt when disobedience occurs. In Israel this guilt is not just individual, but corporate, penetrating the whole tribal community. Guilt is such that God calls them a “disobedient people.” The result is a culture motivated by morals, mores, and Moses. Social pressure becomes the policeman of obedience.

Finally, Paul tells us in Galatians that God gave the Law to Israel not to save them or reform them, but rather to lead them to a higher and greater motive for obedience-faith in Christ’s completed work on the Cross. (See **Galatians 3**). He is saying you must meet Moses before you meet Jesus! The high standard of Moses’ law will reveal your sin and show you the need for a Savior.

The New Covenant (NT)

Jesus comes and puts a new face on Israel’s God. He introduces them to His Father in heaven. His Father is the dad in Luke 15’s parable of the prodigal son. Jesus lifts obedience out of the muck and mire of the pig pen struggle for perfection. He reveals by his own obedience a kind of

relationship with God that seeks only to please a loving Father, and to give Him glory. It reveals an obedience that is of faith and trust in the Father's heart of love.

What really changes people, making them willing to obey God?

1. Will Laws, rules and principles do it?

Not really. In fact just the opposite happens. You might put a sign up in your yard that says, "*Do not walk on the grass.*"

What will it accomplish? Only that it will guarantee every kid in the block will defiantly walk, fun and bike on your lawn! Laws and rules can restrain and restrict, but never transform. Laws only reveal our selfish sin nature, they can never transform it.

2. Will God's grace+ works bring about obedience?

No, not really. It is human nature to not trust grace or God's love as all sufficient. We seem to want to add something to the Cross of Christ. Our impulse is to not fully trust God's Grace, but to add rules or morals as proofs of our good intentions. This idea came up before the early Church in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabus, along with other brethren go up to the Jerusalem mother church to debate this issue of grace + works (obedience). After much intense discussion the Elders of the Jerusalem congregation wrote a letter to the Gentile believers saying in effect, "*we must not put a burden on you Gentiles that we ourselves cannot bear.*" (See **Acts 15:19-29**)

Here is their conclusion about serving God to gain favor with God: "if you include any obedience on your part to gain favor with God, you are nullifying God's grace."

Why is this true?

1. Only Perfect Obedience can please God

Back in the 1990's here in America, a men's movement became popular known as **Promise Keepers**. Many thousands of Christian men attended these rallies. It was a movement that meant well but was misguided somewhat. Why? Because we make promises to God that we cannot keep apart from His grace. Making promises to a Holy God is futile because His character demands perfect obedience not just partial or promised obedience. Only Jesus has offered God perfect obedience. Hebrews tells us Christ was tempted, tested, and suffered, yet still was obedient through his suffering. (**Heb. 4:8**) Our job is not to try to copy him or imitate him, but rather to trust in Him. Our task is not the imitation of Christ but rather simple trust in His perfect obedience in our behalf.

2. Religious Manipulation

There is also a kind of obedience that seeks to control or manipulate God. The idea being that we can control the Deity by our behaviors that earn his favor. Thus by obeying, some think they can balance the scales between blessings and curses from God. They suppose that God has a super scoreboard in heaven and he has angels keeping score on us.

The gospel (good news) is that you cannot score points with a God who does not keep score! The Cross of Christ is God's scoreboard. The Cross shouts out to us-"the debt is paid!" **2 Cor. 5:21**

says it well—“*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” Do you see that? In Christ we have been declared “righteous” because the righteousness of Christ in ours by simply trusting in the completed work (perfect obedience) of Christ. Someone has said, “How do you score points with a God who is not keeping score?”

It is impossible; so why do we keep trying, performing, and even manipulating?

The Obedience of Faith

Like book-ends the letter to the Roman church begins with the “*obedience of faith*” (**Rom. 1:5**) and ends with the “*obedience of faith*” (**Rom. 16:26**). A good translation of this phrase is the “obedience that results from trusting God’s Grace in Christ Jesus.” It is an obedience that springs forth in joy from trusting the loving Grace of God. It is an obedience that faith (trust) produces. In **Romans 1:4** Paul even says that the whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring about “*the obedience of faith*” to all the nations. This obedience that faith produces is God’s gospel for all men.

This gospel of trusting God is the opposite of man-made religion. Religion is self-trusting performance, whereas true Obedience is not about getting something from God but rather faithfulness to what God has already done in Christ. Any efforts to relate to God that is based on distrust (of God) is evil. Why is it evil? Because it is obedience that is rooted in *SELF* and self-promotion. Any obedience based on distrust in God’s goodness, grace and mercy will always create religion. It will not produce fellowship with God.

Commands and Provision

The good news of the Gospel is that when God demands our obedience, he has previously provided for it. He never asks us to obey without first making provision.

For example: God commands husbands to love their wives even as Christ loves the Church and gave Himself for it. My question is- Who can love like that? I cannot! In fact you cannot either! Only Christ in us, living and loving through us can love our wives that much.

In Luke’s Gospel we see a great example of trusting/faith. Jesus enters a synagogue and as he was teaching there he sees a man whose right hand is withered. Jesus tells the man to raise up and walk over to him (the man obeys). Jesus commands the man to “*stretch out your hand!*” and *the man did so; and his hand was completely restored.*” (**Luke 6:10**) Notice the command and the provision of power to perform. The man’s hand was crippled, he could not stretch it out, yet he trusted Christ and did as he was asked to do, and his faith allowed him to obey.

This is how Grace-filled obedience blesses those who obey and blesses God. We obey God because we worship and adore God. We are Sons of God eager to please God.

Oswald Chambers calls obedience, “my utmost for His highest- my best for His glory. “When we sin (disobey) we have no sense of condemnation or shame, but we run to the Father claiming our forgiveness and trusting God’s grace to cover our disobedience.

Living in grace provides fellowship with the Father and turns duty into joyful service. Every command becomes not a burden but a promise of a blessed fellowship and partnership with God our Father.

*“Obedience that does not have ‘delight’ in it, is not New Testament obedience.”
Dudley Hall*