



Conducted by
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"I get quite depressed when I see the many kinds of sin which are rampant today; violence, theft, sexual perversion, marital incompatibility, etc. How can christians help such people, and how can we keep our own families from contact with such things?"

This is a question which is troubling the minds of many christians, and not only christians but many social and community workers also. What has gone wrong, we ask ourselves? Have we contributed in any way to this undesirable and unwholesome state of affairs?

For my own part, I feel sure that many of our problems are attributable to one cause — disobedience. It is the root cause of sin; it is responsible for the disintegration of that bulwark of the social structure, the family unit; it is out-working itself in industrial anarchy; and sad to relate, it has been and still is the most divisive element in a pathetically divided church. The questioner is quite right to feel concern about such things; perhaps the best way we can help everyone concerned is by learning something about obedience and stressing the importance that God places upon it.

Obedience

This is defined as, "submission to a superior's will; compliance with that will". In the general sense this means that anyone who is in a position of authority over other people has a right to expect that such authority as is evident will be submitted to, and that all reasonable demands from the source of such authority will be complied with. In the christian context, of course, the source of our superior authority is God, and submission to His will and compliance with His commands are absolutely vital to the christian.

The above definition needs, perhaps, a little more explanation. The christian needs to understand that it is not enough to be passive in submission but that he should actively comply in bringing the will of God before others. Furthermore, it displays a wrong attitude to submit in obedience to someone because he is stronger than we are, or to comply because we are forced to. Neither of these attitudes was true of Christ, nor should they be true of us.

If we are to believe Jesus — and we surely must — then we can only conclude that he experienced delight in being obedient unto his father. Yes, with all the pain, humiliation, and suffering, he delighted in doing the will of God. This is the corner-stone of the biblical teaching on obedience; this must permeate our thoughts as we search for our responses to God's will.

The Obedience of Christ

Paul taught, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous". (Rom. 5:19). Oh, the awful power of disobedience! This statement by Paul illustrates quite clearly why man forfeited the grace of God. It was because he stupidly and willingly took upon himself the rebellious nature of Satan. The awful climax of disobedience and rebellion is portrayed by Milton when he depicts Satan as saying, 'Better to reign in hell, than to serve in heaven'. The rich man who went to that place of torment evidently didn't think so.

In marked contrast, the obedience of Christ illustrates just how far-reaching his attitude was. Disobedience, which had separated, was now rectified by obedience which re-united. The way to God was re-opened by the obedience of Jesus. You mark and choose carefully, dear reader. Will you accelerate the discriptive and de-harmonizing elements by disobedience; or will you apply the healing and unifying balm of obedience, as Jesus did?

In order to further our quest for finding delight in obedience, we ought to examine a statement made about Jesus in Hebrews. The writer says, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him". (Heb. 5:8,9). This obedience of Christ was not learned in the sense in which we understand learning, i.e., in the sense that he was ignorant concerning obedience previous to learning it. The idea expressed in the Hebrew passage is of Christ being accustomed to obedience by constant practice of it. This embodies the idea that Christ understood at all times that God required obedience as a constant and recurring attitude. Therefore, the verb 'to learn', in this case, means to be accustomed to obedience by constant use and practice. Paul expressed the same idea when he said, "Not that I speak in respect of want: For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11). Now, how can we apply this?

Obedience to Parents

Paul teaches, "Children, obey your parents in all things: For this is well pleasing unto the Lord". (Coll. 3:20). The verb 'to obey' is an old verb and means 'to listen under (as looking up to), to hearken'. The idea expressed is that of the child looking up to the parents and listening intently to what the parents are saying. There is also the thought that what is intended is continual obedience and not just occasional; Paul says 'in all things'.

This teaching implies and presupposes that christian parents, at least, will not make unreasonable or unjust demands of the child. Parents should try to create the climate in which a child can fulfil the teaching of Paul. Children can be provoked in two ways; either in a bad sense or a good sense. To provoke in the bad sense would be to nag and victimise the child habitually, but in the good sense it would be to motivate by good influence and zeal. It is extremely difficult for children to obey parents in all things; if this is to be done then parents will need to make the road to obedience as easy as possible for the children.

I have always thought that if the child/parent relationship is to be right then a meaningful dialogue needs to be entered into. By dialogue I simply mean parents and children talking to each other. Meaningful dialogue does not consist solely in parents telling children what they want them to do. The understanding of each other's point of view is vitally necessary in creating the atmosphere in which the child can obey the parent. The burden of our society is that waves of lawlessness sweep the country because of parental waywardness leading to disobedience. There is much more understanding needed in this area.

Obedience to the Word

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, 'We ought to obey God rather than men'. (Acts 5:29). Obedience to God is exemplified in obedience to His word. After all, we started our christian lives in this way. In his letter to Rome Paul said, "But ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17) 'Form' as used here is probably an allusion to immersion which indicated our separation from sin. In this we became 'slaves of righteousness'; we changed masters. This, I believe, is what was in Peter's mind when he said "we ought to obey God rather than men". You see, there is no middle ground. We either obey God or we don't; all of us would do well to remember this.

Obedience to the word ensures that we have the key to spiritual knowledge. As Jesus himself put it. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). It will also ensure divine fellowship. "If a man love me, he will keep my words: And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). Now I ask you, can we go wrong if we realise that we have the divine presence with us? Not at all. But we must be absolutely sure that we can obey the divine will, and we can only do this if we know what that word is. Therefore, let's read it.

Conclusion

Before we can lift the depression which our questioner talks about, I believe that we must stop giving the impression that obedience to parents and to God's word doesn't really matter.

We must also tell people that at the heart of God's love is obedience, and we must not be afraid to tell them that God expects that they will obey Him in all things. And finally, we must become accustomed to obedience by constant use and practice. Then we shall see a better society, and we shall be glad to be part of it.