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The Soul Of Obedience

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Remember the old story about the man who was going on a journey, and asked his son to lay out the farm according to his instructions? Corn was to be planted in this field, beans in that, the garden here, a shed built there. The boy put the corn where his father wanted it, and the beans where the father said. But he changed places for the shed and garden. When his father returned and objected to his son's disobedience, the boy argued he had done half of what his father ordered; but the father said, "No, you did nothing in obedience. It is obvious that you only put the corn and beans where you did, because you thought they should go there."

We might well ask ourselves the question, "WHY do we live as we do? Is it out of respect for God and His laws, or are we simply following a pattern of mores that we approve, and which represents no higher authority than our own traditions. The motive for obedience is an aspect of law that has been somewhat ignored.

In Paul's arguments on law versus faith (Romans and Galatians) he certainly does not rule out law. He says faith establishes law (Rom. 3:31); and he says the law is "holy, just and good" (7:12). Its weakness was by virtue of its subjects, men (8:3); but even then, it served to bring them unto Christ — aware of their need for mercy and forgiveness (Gal. 3:24).

One can not accept the existence of God and ignore the expression of His will; and acknowledging the relation of creature to Creator imposes an obligation to submit to His hand (Rom. 1:20-21; 9:20-21). There is a close correlation between keeping the commands of God and abiding in God, and He in us (Jn. 14:23; 1 Jn. 2:3-6).

Christ is the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9); and saving faith is an obedient faith (Jas. 2:24) "which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). The principle here is not that of law meritoriously obeyed (which would demand perfection) but because obedience from the heart demonstrates our attitude toward Him who made and gave the law. How else could the breaking of one law make a man "guilty of all"? James explains, "He that said, Do not commit adultery said also, Do not kill" (Jas. 2:10-12; 4:10-11). To select from all God said those parts we approve and are willing to obey, assumes a position above that of God. It is to imagine ourselves judges OF the law, hence OF God, instead of realizing we are subject to and are judged BY the law, hence BY God. Without the proper attitude toward God, no obedience (?) is acceptable to Him.

Some have suggested these Bible approved motives for obedience: fear of punishment, appreciation of our position as clay to Potter, and varying degrees of love for God. Paul says "the love of Christ (our recognition of His love for us) constrains us" (2 Cor. 5:14). However you list them, they start with faith "that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Perhaps we are failing to elicit more obedience to God because we do not work hard enough at preparing the soil, or stirring proper motives.

Plain Talk May 1980

A Little Help from Our Friends

John R. Gibson

Luke 5:17-26 tells of a paralytic whose friends brought him to Jesus, only to find that they could not get him in the house because of the crowd. However, these were not the kind of friends who gave up easily. They carried their friend up to the roof on his bed and then, after uncovering the roof, they broke through it (Mark 2:4) to let their friend down into the room right before Jesus.

While the most important lesson in the story is that Jesus demonstrated His power to forgive sins by healing the man's paralysis (Lk. 5:24, 25), I want us to think for a few moments about the importance of his friends. While most people prefer to be self-reliant, this man could not have gotten to the house without the help of his friends. Then, if his friends hadn't been persistent enough to carry him up to the roof and willing to risk the wrath of the homeowner, he would have remained paralyzed. Jesus is clearly the focus of the story, but can't we learn something from the friends?

There are several Bible passages that stress individual responsibility and accountability, such as...

"But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load." Gal. 6:4, 5

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." 2 Cor. 5:10

"Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." 2 Thes. 3:12

We could go on and on with similar passages, but on the other hand we could also multiply passages that teach an interdependence of one upon another in the body of Christ.

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Gal. 6:2

"For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" 1Cor. 12:15-21

"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." Eph. 4:28

We need to realize there are responsibilities we have before God that no one can take for us and we are ultimately responsible for choosing or rejecting righteousness (Ezek. 18:20). However, it is essential that our attempts to bear our own load (Gal. 6:5) not keep us from accepting needed help and cause us to fail to ultimately serve God. If we find ourselves in the following situations, let's not refuse the help of others or prevent them from serving and assisting us in our service to God.

Lack of knowledge. Through God's word we come to know His will which we must obey and are given all things pertaining to life and godliness (Matt. 7:21; 2 Pet. 1:3), so we should never be ashamed to be like the eunuch and ask for help (Acts 8:31). Be careful whom you ask, but if you don't know, ask!

Spiritual struggles. Don't allow pride or the risk of embarrassment to keep you from asking others to help bear your burdens (Gal. 6:2). If one as great as Paul felt compelled to ask that others pray for his courage in boldly proclaiming the word (Eph. 6:18, 19), why should we be unwilling to ask for prayers in overcoming weaknesses. James exhorted, *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed,"* and followed the exhortation with the promise that *"the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* (James 5:16).

Inability to assemble. The assemblies of the saints are important to pleasing God and keeping ourselves spiritually strong (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:27-30; Heb. 10:24, 25). While there may be times when poor health will prevent our assembling with the saints, there may also be times when it is our unwillingness to ask for or accept help that keeps us

home. Perhaps we can't drive (especially at night) or we have some health concern that requires assistance getting in and out of the building and because we hate to ask for help, we stay home. Shouldn't we instead allow others to be the servants God wants them to be (Matt. 20:27, 28)?

Though we will stop here, these principles can and should be applied to other situations. Let's all strive to bear our own load, while at the same time allowing others to help us bear our burdens (Gal. 6:5, 2).