

Obedience

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The Bible is filled with words that we no longer hear in normal conversations. In fact, sometimes the concepts these words represent seem lost in this day and age. One of those words is in Hebrews 5: 8. The word is “obedience.”

That is a word used very little today. From what my wife tells me about her classroom, it is a concept most kids of this generation do not understand. And most of us would find it very comforting if laws were obeyed. If the laws of man and laws of God were obeyed, life would be better. We'd all feel safer.

But laws are not obeyed. We all break laws at some point, whether breaking laws is a conscious decision or not. We break some rules without thought. Maybe we have broken that rule so often that not obeying it is second nature. We often think, “If we are not hurting anyone, why obey the rule?” Or, “If there is no one coming, why do I need to stop for the red light or the stop sign. I will slow down and then go on through it. No one is going to get hurt.” The problem is that disobedience will become a habit.

The question to be asked is, “What causes our obedience and disobedience?” The Bible says we obey for one of two reasons—fear or love.

The Old Testament says we obey the Lord out of fear. As Proverbs states, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” We obey because we fear the punishment for not obeying; we fear the consequences. We obey God because we do not want God to mark another sin by our name in the big book in the sky. We fear going to Hell.

The New Testament response is that we obey God out of love. We love Christ and God because Christ loved humankind enough to suffer on the Cross for us. We follow Jesus's command to love our neighbor out of love because it mirrors the love showed us.

We disobey laws out of self-love. This self-love declares it loves itself more than anything, even fear. It declares it knows what is best (typically instant gratification of some want or need). The self-love places itself over other people and God. The needs of the self outweigh all other considerations. A driver ignores the red light because he needs to be somewhere else quickly. A thief steals because he needs whatever he is stealing more than the rightful owner. I don't obey the rules because I know what is best for me.

In today's society, it is the rogue, the one who breaks the rules, who has become the role model and hero for many. People who obey the rules are viewed as weak. If you show love or respect to other people, you are weak. Julie told me recently that a student

asked her why she was nice to the janitor. Julie replied that he was a nice man and did his job well. She added that she respected him for his hard work and dedication to the school. The student did not understand that Julie showed the janitor respect because in the world's hierarchy the janitor is a lower position than teacher. But from a Christian perspective, he is not just the guy with the broom, trash can, and extra light bulbs... he is a neighbor, and all people are both children of God and sinners deserving punishment.

So why do we disobey? In some sense it is in our human nature. We rebel against authority. Children learn it early with some of their first words—no. It provides a thrill to disobey. Someone who obeys the rules is seen as a weak, mindless cog, an unthinking person.

It would be easier to disobey, to stay in bed on Sunday mornings than it is to get up and gather with others to worship the Lord. It is easier to do what we want, because after all, it really is about us, right? It is easier not to turn the other cheek when we are injured. It is easier not to forgive when we are hurt.

But obedience takes strength, a quiet strength and willful purpose that come from the recognition that the self is not the most important item or power.

It's not just all about us. It's about God's command to love our neighbor.

Robert Arndt