

Obedience versus Pride

*“Samuel said,
Hath the LORD as
great delight in
burnt offerings
and sacrifices, as
in obeying the voice
of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is
better than
sacrifice, and to
hearken than the
fat of rams.”
—I Samuel 15:22*

THE MEANING OF OBEDI-
ence can be stated in many
ways. It is described by *The
Illustrated Bible Story* by
Story as follows: “Obedience
is doing what you are
instructed to do. We are com-
manded to be obedient to God
in every way, which makes
sense if we really believe that
he knows what is best for us.
Obedience is an ingredient of

our faith because we are convinced that God can teach and protect us, no matter what circumstances he might want us to encounter.”

The principle of obedience to God is illustrated in the Old Testament by this passage. “Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear

him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.”
—Deut. 13:3,4

OBEDIENCE FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

The foregoing words were spoken to fleshly Israel, but the Scriptures are clear that these things were “written aforetime ... for our learning.” (Rom. 15:4) It therefore behooves the footstep followers of Christ to see and apply what the Bible teaches regarding obedience to God in order to prove acceptable to him.

As earthly parents, many of us can identify with the desire to have obedient children. Having brought them into the world, we have much more experience than they and our desire is to guide and protect them from harm by inculcating the principle of obedience. When they are young, generally they acknowledge that we know more than they and thus our instructions to them, when followed, usually bring a sense of security to their lives. As they get older, perhaps they can see some of our imperfections more clearly. Some may want to challenge what we say because they may think they know more than we do in certain matters. As a worst-case scenario, where there is a lack of respect for the parents, they may even disobey the counsel provided and in turn reap the serious consequences of their disobedience.

TWO HEAVENLY SONS

As we look at the Bible, we might contrast the attitude and conduct of two of God’s sons. Of the *Logos*—Jesus in his pre-human existence—it is written. “The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. ... Then I was by

him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.”—Prov. 8:22,30-33

Our Lord was always in harmony with God’s will and daily he was his Father’s delight because he continually manifested obedience in all that God would have him do. When our Master came to earth and reached the age of thirty, the Apostle Paul, referring to a prophecy about Jesus from the Book of Psalms, records this. “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.”—Heb. 10:5-7; Ps. 40:6-8

As an exhortation to Christians, we read this: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name.” (Phil. 2:5-9, *Revised Standard Version*) Thus, we can see the premium the Heavenly Father placed upon obedience and the exaltation his Son Jesus received because of his faithfulness in this regard.

When we contrast our Lord's attitude with that of Lucifer, what a difference there is. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."—Isa. 14:12-14

Lucifer, unlike Jesus, desired to be equal to Jehovah by establishing a rival dominion. As a result of his rebellion and disobedience we read our Master's words attesting to Lucifer's portion after iniquity was found in his heart. "He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." (Luke 10:18) Thus, we have the results of obedience and disobedience clearly contrasted as demonstrated by the conduct of two Spiritual sons of God, our Lord Jesus and Lucifer—Satan.

PAUL'S COUNSEL

In Paul's writings we find much in the way of spiritual instruction and warnings. When internalized, these will strengthen, safeguard, and ensure the church's sanctification as they are applied to the individual believer's heart and mind. His epistles contain many expressions in these areas as he elaborated upon what Jesus said in the Gospels. The apostle also provided some specifics as to how we can be obedient children of the Heavenly Father.

One such example is found in Paul's counsel to the elders of Ephesus. "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed

therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”—Acts 20:27-30

Through personal testimony, Paul describes his own regimen of discipline for maintaining obedience to God. “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so, fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”—I Cor. 9:24-27

In another citation, Paul referred to his own need for applying the things he taught, and through obedience to God, be fully sanctified by those truths. Speaking of himself, he said, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:13,14

Thus, Paul attests there is a mark of character and obedience which has been established as a prerequisite to be achieved before one might gain entrance into the heavenly kingdom. This mark is not merely the avoidance of sin, of suffering for

righteousness' sake, or the manifestation of a dutiful love toward God because he first loved us. It also goes beyond an appreciation of purity and the principles of truth and of a recognition and love of God's character as it is revealed to us. It is even more than loving our brethren, who are inspired by the same hopes, aims and ambitions as we have, yet who struggle as we do with fleshly weaknesses that are common to man.

Beyond all of this, we are to love our enemies. We are not to just tolerate them—refraining from retaliation—yet harboring evil sentiments against them. Rather, we must give evidence of having such a submissive heart that we will appreciate the privilege of willingly drinking from the same cup of ridicule, reproach and suffering which our Master partook of during his earthly ministry. The Scriptures make reference to all of these matters and if we are obedient children of God, we should be able to manifest this same love with enthusiasm.—Matt. 5:11,12,44-48; Rom. 15:3; I Pet. 4:14

EXEMPLIFYING GODLINESS

We are called upon to develop godliness, Christ-likeness and perfect love in our hearts to such an extent that we will have sympathy towards those who would speak evil against us, injure, or spitefully use us in some fashion. Thus we would be proving that we have learned obedience and are striving to endure patiently in the face of opposition.

Are we going to be at this stage at the beginning of our consecrated walk? Certainly not. Are we going to be able always to give a clear outward manifestation of this kind of love and obedience

when we are at an advanced stage of Christian character development? No again. We recognize that because of inherited fleshly weaknesses we will not always demonstrate this by our actions as we would desire. We know, however, that God looks upon the heart, and that he can determine and approve our oft-times feeble attempts along this line because our intent is proper and in accordance with his will. When we reach the mark of perfect intentions, we can rejoice that we have progressed to that extent by God's grace, but we are to remember the apostle's injunction, "having done all, to stand."—Eph. 6:13

Jesus was at the mark of perfect love at his consecration, but he was tested. Throughout his ministry he proved his ability to maintain his perfect standing through faithful obedience and service as he carried out his sacrifice even unto death. With us, it takes considerable experience in the school of Christ before we are able to progress to that point. This being the case, we are forcibly reminded of the need for having on the whole armor of God, that we might be able to successfully resist any attacks from the world, the flesh or the Adversary to divert us from the goal.—Eph. 6:10-18

HIGH THINGS

Paul also exhorts us as follows: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (II Cor. 10:4,5) Additionally, we read from Isaiah 55:9 God's words through the prophet, "As

the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Only as human instrumentalities are led and guided by the Holy Spirit, therefore, are we to hearken unto their words. Thus, Paul directs our attention to the fact that because of our imperfections, sinful tendencies are entrenched in our minds, in our imaginations, and in our thoughts. Sometimes it is a little pride, or selfishness, or the adherence to speculations or false doctrines which have been handed down to us.

Only the Holy Spirit, and the influence of God’s Word, will cast down imaginations, ignorance, unholy ambitions, speculations, and every form of thought which would be detrimental to the New Creature’s growth and development. Furthermore, the “high things” also might relate to a desire for recognition by others. We may wish to shine out among our fellow creatures, to be well thought of, to receive the empty honors of the earth, to have wealth, influence, or to be held in esteem, either by the world or even our brethren. This desire for self-exaltation is a deeply rooted characteristic that is part and parcel of our fallen nature. It must be striven against by hearkening unto the Word of God.

There are many other scriptural instructions about this matter, a few of which include the following. “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” (Rom. 12:3) “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be

unpunished.” (Prov. 16:5) “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”—James 4:6

SELF-INVENTORY

In considering this overall topic of obedience versus pride, it is preferable to view it as a way of taking personal inventory, as opposed to making judgments about others which might be condemnatory. This should be kept in mind because of an important scriptural principle: “Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”—Matt. 7:3-5

Often outward appearances might be deceiving, and we may have made some prejudgments about brethren or even those in the world. They may have seemed aloof, harsh, or unfriendly. Yet, if we take the time to talk with them, we might get a totally different perspective and come to appreciate qualities which were not evident to us on the surface. In contrast to this, we might appear very favorable in public whereas, those close to us might see us in a different light.

Sometimes our circumstances enable us to be engaged in much spiritual activity. We may ask ourselves: “If I am spending most of my time in serving the Lord, is not this what he would want me to do, and how could I possibly be susceptible to feelings of pride?” If we compare ourselves to others whom we think are not doing as much to serve the Lord

as we are, there could be a problem. If we never miss a meeting or a convention, if we write or call isolated brethren, if we engage in regular private study at home, if we are faithful in our witness opportunities, if we cooperate with other brethren in special truth related projects, if we hold an office in the ecclesia or in various Truth related organizations, these are all excellent credentials. However, we must be very cautious about our attitude.

If we testify about what we are doing, it should be done in the spirit of trying to encourage others in serving the Lord because we can learn from one another. Frequently we might not have thought of something else to do in the cause of the Gospel message if we had not received a suggestion from hearing about the activities of others. If, on the other hand, any of us have feelings of “look at how much I am doing to serve the Lord,” then perhaps our expressions might be based upon a motive of receiving approval from others, which is a clear indication of pride.

A Scripture to observe in this connection is as follows. “Beware of doing your good deeds conspicuously to catch men’s eyes or you will miss the reward of your Heavenly Father. So, when you do good to other people, don’t hire a trumpeter to go in front of you—like those play-actors in the synagogues and streets who make sure that men admire them. Believe me, they have had all the reward they are going to get! No, when you give to charity, don’t even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be secret. Your Father who knows all secrets will reward you.”—Matt. 6:1-4, *J.B. Phillips New Testament*

POSSIBLE EVIDENCES OF PRIDE

Additionally, we are not to manifest pride in our ability to comprehend and share God's plan with others. We should feel appreciative of the fact that we are privileged to witness for the Lord, because it was by his grace that we were given the understanding of his plans and purposes. The numerous times we fail to do God's will in many areas should, in fact, remind us of our own inherent unworthiness. Let us ever consider the basis of our privilege to be considered God's ambassadors. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."—I Cor. 1:26-29

Another area which may be an indicator of pride in our hearts is the manifestation of an overly critical spirit. It is very easy to see the faults of others. We should not look down upon others, believing that we are superior to them, but rather let us realize that all of us are imperfect. We all need assistance from the Heavenly Father and more of the Holy Spirit to overcome our many weaknesses according to the flesh. Who among us cannot appreciate the Apostle Paul's words: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the

evil which I would not, that I do. ... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” (Rom. 7:18,19,24,25) Let us ever be mindful of our own need for God’s mercy and grace in our undone condition. Similarly, let us always entertain thoughts of love and kindness towards others who must restrain their own flesh as we must do with ours.

SOLELY PLEASING GOD

An old fable that has been passed down for generations talks about an elderly man who was traveling with a boy and a donkey. As they walked through a village, the man was leading the donkey and the boy was walking behind. The townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding, so to please them he climbed up on the animal’s back. When they came to the next village, the people said the old man was cruel to let the child walk while he enjoyed the ride. So, to please them, he got off and set the boy on the animal’s back and continued on his way. In the third village, people accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk, and the suggestion was made that they both ride. So, the man climbed on and they set off again. In the fourth village, the townspeople were indignant at the cruelty to the donkey because he was made to carry two people. The frustrated man was last seen carrying the donkey down the road.

We smile, but this story makes a good point: We cannot please everybody, and if we try, we end up carrying a heavy burden. *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) Well-meaning Christians may offer us advice, and much of it is valuable. However, when we try to do everything other believers want us to do, we can easily become frustrated and confused. That is why we need to remember that the ones we must please above all others are our Heavenly Father and his Son Christ Jesus, and we do that by obeying scriptural principles.

As Christians, our prime responsibility is to obey God's Word as outlined in the Scriptures, so that through the Holy Spirit's influence we may develop a character which the Father will approve. The Bible also indicates the spirit of pride is displeasing to God, and we should engage in self-examination to determine the motives for our actions. May we ever keep in mind and strive to emulate the Master's example of humility and obedient submission to the Father's will. Thus, let us walk as he walked and at the end of our course receive the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant; ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."—Matt. 25:23 ■