

A message based on the following readings given on 17th May 2009
Acts 10:44-48 I John 5:1-6 John 15:9-17
By Joe Romeo

Obedience

Jesus says in the Gospel reading

“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” (John 15:10)

John in his first letter says

“This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world.” (1John 5:3-4)

Obedience is a vital part of our lives as Christians.

So what is obedience?

The dictionary says the following

“Compliance with an order or law, or submission to another authority”
Submission is “accepting or yielding to a superior force or authority.”

Here are my definitions:

“**Obedience**” is doing what you’re told to do, and not doing what you are told not to do.

“**Perfect Obedience**” (my suggestion) is doing what you are told to do, using all the resources you have at hand, doing it joyfully, and with a willingness that continues in the task despite opposition and suffering, not because of fear of punishment or desire of reward, but simply out of love for the person giving the command.

“**Claytons obedience**” (Claytons being “the drink you’re having when your not having a drink”, again my suggestion) Is doing what you are told, because you are caught between either the desire for reward, or the fear of punishment. There is no love for the person giving orders, there is no joy in the task, and any suffering or opposition heightens the resentment towards the person giving orders for having to complete the task.

“**Toeing the line**” is looking like you are doing what you are told, to avoid penalty.

“**Imperfect obedience**”

Struggling and failing at perfect obedience. Probably/hopefully what we experience as Christians.

Disobedience or **rebellion** is the opposite of obedience.

Being busy is not necessarily being obedient.

I wish to imply then, that obedience is more than physically carrying out a task we are given. It involves an attitude of the heart.

It was interesting yesterday listening to a man share about his experiences in his infantry training. He described how soldiers are dressed plainly and with short hair in order to reinforce the idea of being part of a team, and suppress individualism, this helps in the development of soldiers that will obey on impulse, despite being under fire or in positions of danger.

Obedience involves a surrendering of will. Which in the right circumstances is a most beautiful thing.

I have never “broken” a horse. I know there are different techniques used to break a horse, and I guess that some might be cruel, I am not implying that cruelty to be justified. I simply wish to point out that if a horse is to be useful as a creature, able to serve and benefit its owner, it first must be broken. Its will must submit to the trainer.

This surrendering of will is not a natural process. Any of us who are parents will have experienced the clash of wills between parents and children. Any of us who are children, have also experienced this.

Paul says in Romans “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God, nor can it do so.” Romans 8:7

When we consider the Christian life, and look at the scriptures we find there is a strong connection between obedience and belief, between obedience and hearing, between obedience and faith, between obedience and love.

In Hebrews we read “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” Hebrews 3:15. And further “they were not able to enter because of unbelief”

Hearing God’s word carries with it the implicit expectation of obeying that word. To hear and not obey is really a sign of not hearing with faith, and therefore unbelief.

It is the expectation of most new parents, that their child will obey them. Obedience seems to be the natural response to being loved and nurtured. And young children probably offer less resistance to parental commands, than older children. Still that clash of wills can be seen from a very young age.

Some children are more naturally compliant. I was one of those children. But if you put that compliance to the test, rebellion is not too hard to find.

Obedience is not a popular subject.

There is a commandment that says “Honour your father and your mother”. Yet as we grow up, there are so many voices that say “stick up for yourself and put your parents in their place”. This is not Godly.

Keeping your word is also connected to obedience.

It is worth looking at the **Obedience of Jesus**.

In John 6:15 Jesus says “For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but to do the will of him who sent me”.

So Jesus was strongly motivated, out of his love for the Father, and a deep security in the Father's love for himself, to do all that God willed for him to do, no matter the cost. His love for us flowed out of this love for the Father, and is also part of his motivation for doing God's will. A deep faith in God's goodness, knowing that everything the Father wills is good, and results in goodness, also strengthens the desire to obey.

Think of Jesus baptism, what does Jesus say to John, who recognizes that Jesus is far greater than he, and that in one sense, he is not worthy to baptise him? “Let us do so now, it is proper for us to fulfil all righteousness”. Or, in other words, even though it seems unusual, this is God's will, so lets get on with it.

Jesus spent some time in the desert. Why did he decide to go into the desert? He was led by the Spirit. He obeyed God's leading. Satan told him to turn stones to bread. I guess he could have done so, but his answer was that he was to listen to what God wanted, not what Satan wanted. “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”

Another event that comes to mind is the turning of the water into wine. When the wine ran out at the wedding, Mary turned to Jesus saying “They have no more wine”. I guess this was a wedding on a budget. It would have embarrassed the hosts. Jesus answer was “Dear woman why do you involve me? My time has not yet come”. But Mary knew he would serve the situation, and told the servants to do whatever he asks.

Of course Jesus' perfect obedience is seen most clearly at the cross. Hebrews 12:2 says Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross. Luke 9:51 says: As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

So his path to his crucifixion was deliberate and purposeful, knowing God's will, and what was at stake.

Jesus' obedience was necessary to undo what Adam's disobedience had produced.

If we read in Romans 5, we find “ Just as through the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man, the many will be made righteous.

Jesus obedience is part of what Jesus offers up to God at his death. It is part of the beautiful sacrifice which God accepts in atonement for our disobedience.

God says in 1 Samuel 15:22 “To obey is better than sacrifice”.

The problem is that we naturally disobey.

But it is God who brings us to repentance, brokenness, regeneration, and sonship.
This he does through the Holy Spirit, as he opens our hearts to the truth of his
Love for us in Jesus.

Romans 8

⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

It is the Holy Spirit who gives us a heart to obey.

But is this desire to obey tested? Time and again.
There is opposition from God, the Devil, Idols, and Self.
I mention God because the scriptures say he opposes the proud.

So what are we to do in these circumstances?
Pray, Confess, Listen, Share, Pray, Fast, Stop, Pray, Wait, Pray, Read, Hope, Humble ourselves, Accept, Back Down.

Backing down can be hard.
This is repentance. But it is liberating.
If we read in Act Chpt 10, about Cornelius, we see at the end of that chapter that the Jewish Christians were astounded that God had granted even the gentiles “repentance unto life”. But notice the wording, God *grants* the repentance, he gives us a willingness to turn around. If he didn't, I imagine we would never back down. But let us work with God, not against him, now that we are his children, let's be mature and be ready to listen to his voice and obey.

When we do, we find his commands are not burdensome.
In particular, to love one another, as he has loved us.

Before I end I wish to bring up the point of speaking up against wrongful/evil authority. I agree that as Christians we are sometimes called to stand up against evil even when it comes from those in authority over us. But I believe the correct way to do this, and Jesus is our guide, is to stand, but also accept the consequences of our stand, be that prison or even death, trusting ourselves to God's care in those circumstances, and loving those who punish us unjustly. If we speak up and also cause an uprising, we are potentially leading a rebellion with mixed motives, some ungodly, with opportunity for Satan. I realize this is a hard teaching.

And greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13.

Gratitude is the friend of obedience. Gratitude is the right response to mercy and forgiveness, which we as Christians receive in abundance.