

“Learned He Obedience”

“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.”
—Hebrews 5:8,9

AS WE CONSIDER THIS

text of Scripture from the Apostle Paul, it can easily be divided into three parts. First, Jesus learned obedience by means of suffering, something he had not experienced in his pre-human existence. Second, by experiencing difficult trials and tests, he was made perfect, or complete.

Third, by his faithfulness in all such experiences, even unto death, Jesus became the author of salvation to all rendering obedience to him.

What is obedience? What does it entail? What kind of obedience is required of us by the Heavenly Father? Obedience, in general, implies submission to an authority. For those striving to follow the divine will, they accept God only as the supreme authority in all matters. Paul connects faith to pleasing God by way of obedience, when he says, “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he

that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—Heb. 11:6

Throughout its pages, the Bible establishes God as the supreme authority, and either commands obedience to him, or invites obedience of one’s own choice or volition. The Scriptures are pronounced in giving many examples and lessons regarding both of these aspects of obedience—whether dutiful or voluntary.

DUTIFUL VS. VOLUNTARY OBEDIENCE

Voluntary obedience to God requires faith and loving confidence to his divine will. This is because, in his wisdom, the Heavenly Father may see that we can be more fully developed by suffering temporal loss in some measure. On the other hand, Adam was not asked to render obedience which entailed loss. Every possible blessing of the needs of life, and life itself, would be maintained if he dutifully obeyed.—Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-17

The Israelites were commanded to obey, and only prosperity and blessing came when they did such. Only their disobedience would entail loss. (Exod. 19:4-6; Lev. 26:1-39) By contrast, those who desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus are invited to voluntarily give up their own will and do God’s will, knowing that doing so will bring sacrifice and suffering.—Rom. 12:1; I Pet. 4:12-14

Suffering and sacrifice are generally contrary to human nature and, hence, difficult to endure. However, God has chosen this means to test the fidelity of those who accept his invitation to joint heirship with Christ. Through suffering comes completion

of the divine character in the hearts, minds, words and actions of the Lord's chosen people.

In the day-to-day affairs of life, obedience, in a general way, is often first of the dutiful kind, and may not necessarily imply faith or confidence. For example, in the case of a king and his subjects, or an employer and his employees, obedience may be rendered with little or no confidence. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:1,5 admonishes children to obey their parents, and servants to obey their masters. Confidence in these and other instances is desirable, but not necessarily expressed, and perhaps in some cases is not even merited.

There are also examples of involuntary obedience. These are cases in which there is no choice in the matter. When God created man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man became a living soul. (Gen. 2:7) The ability to breathe involuntarily was miraculously planted by God in the human organism and, barring some physical disease, requires no thought, whether of duty or voluntary, on our part. We breathe when we are awake, or are asleep, and at every moment of activity, without giving any thought to it.

Let us then keep in mind that obedience is often first an expression of duty, whereas in relation to faith and confidence, obedience is elevated to a higher plane, and with a greater reward attached to it. Paul said, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." (Heb. 10:35) Such obedience based on faith and confidence in God engenders boldness, fidelity and trust, without fear of the possibility of any eternal injury, though temporal loss may result.

A child may at first only dutifully obey his parent, but over time, he will gain full confidence, and the good parent likewise will develop confidence in him. It was perhaps this kind of desire which prompted Solomon to say, when he first became king over Israel, “I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. ... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.”—I Kings 3:7,9,10

FULL SUBMISSION TO GOD

The spirit of confidence finds its expression in the disposition of humility and meekness. Humility is the foundation of a virtuous character, and includes the possession of an honest and sober estimation of ourselves, of being easy to approach as well as teachable. (Rom 12:3; James 3:17; Ps. 71:17) Listen to Job’s testimony of humility, confidence and submission toward God. “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. ... Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”—Job 23:10,12

Confident obedience should embrace meekness. Meekness, however, does not imply weakness, but rather manifests itself in a disposition to serve zealously, faithfully, loyally and liberally as did Moses. It was said of him, “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” (Num. 12:3) Yet, Moses was a

man of confident faith and a strong character, as were so many other faithful servants of the Lord found in the Scriptures. Let us seek to emulate them.

One who has the spirit of obedience, based upon faith, possesses full confidence in the one requesting that obedience. This is beautifully shown in the words of Exodus 21:5,6: "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever." We read of this also in the prophetic words of the psalmist, speaking of Jesus, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened [Hebrew: digged]: ... Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God."—Ps. 40:6-8

We each should ask ourselves: Am I a bond servant forever to my Lord? Has my ear been pierced or digged? If not, we are missing the richest blessings of rest, faith, full assurance, settled conviction, and of peace and joy which come only to such as have made a full surrender of their will, their all, to the Heavenly Father. God, through the Prophet Malachi, admonished Israel, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, ... and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."—Mal. 3:10

EXAMPLES FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Let us look at some examples from the Scriptures along the lines of this important subject of obedience. We will briefly examine God's dealings with four prominent individuals—Adam, Abraham, Saul and Jesus.

ADAM

In Genesis 2:15-17, God commanded obedience of Adam as necessary to life. We read: “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” or as *Young's Literal Translation* more correctly renders the last phrase, “... dying thou dost die.”

Adam was mentally, morally, and physically perfect, and every provision had been made for his comfort and sustenance by God. His disobedience, however, meant loss and death, not only for him, but as progenitor of the human race, it plunged his entire posterity into sin and death. (Rom. 3:23; 5:12) Obedience by Adam to God's simple instruction would have meant continued life, health, peace and prosperity—at least until an additional test might have been put upon him.

ABRAHAM

Abraham was called “the Friend of God.” (James 2:23) Yet, he was approached by Jehovah with what might seem like a difficult set of instructions. “The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham,

when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come to the land which I shall shew thee.” “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”—Acts 7:2,3; Heb. 11:8

Think of such submissive faith as Abraham had! No question was raised, no contrary suggestion or requests made, no thought of personal comforts or enjoyments was considered, but with prompt submission and loving confidence he obeyed. God had attached no penalty if Abraham had chosen to stay in his homeland. Thus we see that he voluntarily obeyed, giving an indication of his confidence in and loyalty to his Creator.

Abraham’s willing obedience was accompanied by difficult trials. He was called from his home and his friends. (Gen. 12:1) He and his wife Sarah were promised a son, but had to wait until they were long past child-bearing age for its fulfillment. (Gen. 21:1-7) Later, when their promised son Isaac was a young man, Abraham was instructed to offer him in sacrifice. He willingly obeyed and was only stopped when an angel of God physically intervened and prevented him from slaying his beloved son. (Gen. 22:2,3,11,12) Truly we can say with Paul, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” (Rom. 4:3) What was his reward? The promise, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”; the hope of a “better resurrection”; and the privilege in Christ’s kingdom to be one of the “princes in all the earth.”—Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Heb. 11:35; Ps. 45:16

KING SAUL

By contrast, let us look at Israel's King Saul, his lack of obedience to the Lord, and its consequences. Examining the account found in I Samuel 15, we find these instructions from Jehovah, given to Saul by Samuel, concerning Israel's impending battle with the Amalekites. "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." (vs. 3) Saul and Israel's army quickly gained a great victory. "But Saul and the people spared Agag [king of the Amalekites], and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly. Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments."—vss. 9-11

Continuing, "Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, ... the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."—vss. 13-15

Samuel then reminded Saul that the Lord had instructed Israel to destroy all the Amalekites, including the king, and all the sheep and cattle, leaving no person or animal alive. Samuel then asked Saul, "Wherefore then didst *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?" (I Sam. 15:19) Fear and self-appointment had blurred Saul's vision, resulting in his loss of delight in God's purpose and command. Had Saul been obedient, his kingdom would have been secure and retained by him and his family.

How easy it is at times to think that the Lord will be more pleased with our idea than his word and command. We should vigilantly guard against such thinking. Samuel said to Saul, "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. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king." (vss. 22,23) We recall a similar verse, which states, "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice."—Prov. 21:3

In Jesus' day the Pharisees took pride in their detailed carefulness to pay tithes of certain herbs—mint, anise and cummin—but passed over the "weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." (Matt. 23:23) Others bragged that they had done many wonderful things in the Lord's name, such as prophesying, casting out devils, and other wonderful works, to which Jesus replied, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matt. 7:21-23) How alert we should be to the Heavenly Father's will, rather than our own will or that of others. Simply stated, sacrifices and works not appointed of God are not acceptable to him.

JESUS—A PERFECT EXAMPLE

At the age of twelve, Jesus accompanied his parents to a feast in Jerusalem. On the return journey home, it was discovered that he was missing. After three days, his family found Jesus in the temple questioning the doctors of the Jewish Law and listening to their replies. Upon finding him, his mother Mary gave a mild reproof, to which young Jesus replied, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49, *New King James Version*) Jesus was eager to know from the priests the course he was to take, and no doubt concluded from his discussion with them that his ministry could not start until he was thirty years of age. Always alert to obedience, the account states he went home to Nazareth and was subject to his parents.—vs. 51

Again in obedience, eighteen years later, now at the age of thirty, Jesus came to John the Baptist. He presented himself to John at Jordan to receive the symbol of water immersion. As we recall, John the Baptist had been calling the people of Israel to repentance. His words had touched the hearts of many and they came to him to receive a symbolic baptism of repentance. Jesus came to John, however, with a conscience unstained and a character untarnished by sin. He needed no repentance, yet he too presented himself to John for baptism.

To others who may have witnessed this event, they perhaps thought that Jesus was similarly being baptized unto repentance. However, John recognized his own unworthiness in the presence of the Master, and that Jesus had no sins for which he needed to repent. Nevertheless, Jesus urged him to

perform the ceremony, saying, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt. 3:13-15) Jesus recognized that his baptism was not symbolic of repentance from sin, but was emblematic of his "burial" into the will of God, even unto death.—Rom. 6:3-5

Jesus perceived, and had gladly accepted, the invitation from God to be the second Adam, to redeem the fallen race from sin and death. (I Cor. 15:45-47) Jesus accepted this of his own free will. He knew, too, that obedience to this invitation would be accompanied by suffering and sacrifice, rather than circumstances of ease and pleasure. There would be adverse conditions, privations, ridicule, persecutions, and finally death—all undeserved. He was a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief," the prophet foretold. (Isa. 53:3) Jesus himself said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Matt. 8:20) Jesus fully set aside his own will to do that of his Father. His loss was to be of temporal pleasures and comforts, and many associations of life—home, family, friends—and the loss of his good name. Who would "declare his generation?" asked the Prophet Isaiah.—Isa. 53:8

In full obedience, Jesus emptied himself, made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant in every sense of the word. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:7,8) This was not a light matter in the mind of Jesus, for he had made a solemn covenant with his Father. Prophetically, he stated, "Lo, I come: in the volume of

the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart”—that is, “in the midst of my inward parts,” *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*.—Ps. 40:7,8

Jesus’ repeated testimony was: “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38) Thus, from his baptism at Jordan to the cross, Jesus acquired an obedience under conditions not experienced before—obedience learned and proven by adversity, suffering and sacrifice. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”—Heb. 2:10

John the Baptist declared that Jesus is the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Additionally, in the illustration of the Tabernacle arrangement, Jesus is pictured as a “bullock” on the Day of Atonement, his offering being specially to benefit “his house,” that is, the household of faith, the footstep followers of the Master. (Lev. 16:6; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19) Quoting again from Isaiah concerning Jesus, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”—Isa. 53:5,6

REWARD FOR OBEDIENCE

Jesus was fully set upon doing his Father's will in every experience, and we have been invited to become copies—in heart and intention—of God's dear Son. (Rom. 8:29) What a privilege is ours. How loving of our Heavenly Father to give us this highest, grandest, and loftiest privilege ever offered to angel or man. The giving up of ourselves daily in consecration to do the Lord's bidding should be a glorious experience in our lives. The privilege of presenting ourselves to God as a "living sacrifice," and the work of being "transformed by the renewing of our minds," is one of the greatest honors that could be conferred upon any member of the human race. (Rom. 12:1,2) Yet, this is the invitation God has presented to those desiring to follow in the footsteps of his Son. If we have availed ourselves of this great privilege, then we can say along with the Apostle Paul that our lives are "hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."—Col. 3:3,4

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."—Heb. 4:14,15; 2:18

Let us, then, daily strive to fulfill our covenant with the Heavenly Father, and be faithful to the great favor he has bestowed upon us. Let us also render confident and loyal obedience, even in times

of adversity, affliction, and in the putting down of our human will through humble submission. “Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” “He that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” (Eph. 6:6; I John 2:17) May we daily give ourselves to prayer, the study of God’s Word, and service to him and his people, remembering always to obey the righteous and perfect instructions of our all-wise Heavenly Father. ■