

In Defense of Obedience

What could be better than a lavish gift to the Lord? What would please Him more than a generous sacrifice?

I'll tell you what: obedience.

Modern times have turned obedience into a no-no—except for schools for naughty puppies.

Children grow up learning self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-gratification, punctuated with the occasional time-out.

Adults practice Old Blue Eyes Sinatra's credo: "I did it my way." Law and order come down to verbal games as prosecutors and defense attorneys joust to "win."

It's time to rise to the defense of good old-fashioned obedience, pilloried as it may be by psychologists and practitioners of do-it-yourself religion. God calls all people, and especially those who claim to follow Him, to obedience.

"Has 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 heed than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).*

This note rings throughout the Bible. In both Testaments the root idea of obedience is hearing: When God speaks, His followers listen and do what He tells them to do. Thus, Jesus calls fishers cleaning their nets on the shore of Lake Galilee to follow Him; they leave all and walk with Him in obedience. When the Lord confronts Saul on the road to Damascus and commissions him to be a messenger of the gospel, he is "not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

We find Jesus topping the list of God's worthies who obey Him. Though truly and eternally God, He laid aside His divine estate to become one with us. "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

See Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, bowing unto the weight of sin and rejection, shrinking from the ordeal that lies just ahead. He prays that the cup of agony may pass from Him, but He yields all at last to the Father: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as *You* will" (Matt. 26:39). The book of Hebrews tells us: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8).

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church today I find much more emphasis on grace. I rejoice in this, because we can

never earn eternal life, never weave one thread of our own devising into the glorious robe of righteousness that we must have to stand in the presence of a holy God.

But sometimes the talk among Adventists, and other Christians as well, leaves out the *transforming* power that comes through grace, that brings us back to God's call to obedience.

Hear again the message according to Paul, who is often

quoted in supposed support of a gospel that would set aside obedience to God's will expressed in the Ten Commandments. At the beginning of his letter to the Romans, that powerful exposition of Christianity that sparked the Reformation, we find this:

"Through him [Christ] and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the *obedience that*

comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5, NIV). And then Paul's closing word: "my gospel . . . now revealed . . . so that all nations *might believe and obey Him*" (Rom. 16:25, 26, NIV).

In the original the words in Romans 1:5 and 16:26 are identical: literally, "the obedience of faith." Like bookends these words encapsulate the message of Romans.

Obedience means that we acknowledge Someone greater than ourselves, whose will, not ours, is sovereign. Someone who is not only Savior but our Lord.

The alternative to obedience is defiance, outright or cloaked under the guise of grace. To the latter, the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died at Hitler's hand, gave the decisive response: "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

That is, grace without obedience. Which is not grace at all.

*Bible texts in this editorial are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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