

FOCUS 7: Obedience to God

#1 Who God Is

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

¹² And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

God's requirements in this passage relate to trust and the obedience that flows out of trust. Since our natural disposition is to trust in the visible rather than in what we can't see, we will engage in a spiritual conflict as long as we walk this earth.

This conflict between the call to obedience and the lure of disobedience is well illustrated in the lives of the kings of Judah. Even the minority of kings who did what was right in God's sight struggled with the issue of obedience, and most of these men slipped into disobedience in the latter part of their lives. Whenever this slippage occurred, it happened because the kings decided to trust in something or someone other than the Lord.

In one sense, God's requirements of us are quite simple: fear him, walk in his ways, love him, serve him, obey his commands. All these things are facets of one thing: a growing personal relationship with the God who has already demonstrated his unflinching commitment to our best interests. Note well the stated purpose behind the commands in this passage: they are "for your own good."

The more we realize in our thinking and experience that God always seeks our good, the more we will be willing to trust and obey him in what he asks us to do and to avoid. Do you really believe that everything the Lord commands you to do is "for your own good"? If so, what mental process is going on when you decide to pursue a course of disobedience? What is the connection between knowing God and obeying him?

#2 Who I Am

1 John 5:3

³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome

Despite appearances to the contrary, God's commands are not burdensome. Far from being hardships, they are consistently beneficial, because obedience to God's will inevitably leads to divine blessing. In fact, it can be stated categorically that in the long run, disobedience

to God always produces more pain than obedience to God. This is ironic, since the reason

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we usually disobey God is because we think that obedience will be more painful to us than following our own desires.

If God is really loving, the things he asks us to do are best for us. If God is sovereign, he alone can order our circumstances to bring about what is best for us. Thus, obedience is not burdensome if we are committed to the truths of God's goodness and sovereign purposes.

Jesus told his disciples that obedience to him was the clearest demonstration of their love for him. "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching" (vv. 23-24). Obedience flows out of love for God and leads to greater intimacy with him. Have you ever regretted an act of obedience to God? Have you ever prospered in disobedience to God? To what degree are the choices you make based on right thinking (a Biblical world view), on wrong thinking (a temporal view of the world), or on emotions (the tensions in your life)?

#3 How It Works

Daniel 3:16-18

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Most of what God requires is so easy and beneficial to his followers that we do it without even thinking about it. A smaller number of commands require discipline, commitment, accountability groups -- some intentional decisions and maintenance. But periodically the leader finds himself or herself backed into a corner. That's when it's crunch time: "Obey God and lose the deal," "Obey God and kill the chance for a promotion." For these three young men it was, "Obey God and lose your life."

For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego -- and for all of us -- obedience at that level requires a clear conviction. At that level, obedience is never based on what's at stake, what's to be gained or lost. It is only based on what's real. To these three men the furnace was real. The threat on their life was real. The choice they faced was real. But so was the Sovereign God.

For these three young men, this issue was highly focused. Although two conflicting orders were given, the issue wasn't so much "What was the order?" but "Who gave it?" For these three, the order of a king who could take their lives would never take precedence over the will of Almighty God. Their story of courage has inspired untold numbers of believers who

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have faced the fire -- both literally and figuratively -- over the centuries. Let their courage work its way into your life as well. Reflect please.

#4 What I Do

Matthew 26:39

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

This is the ultimate statement of obedience. What Jesus wanted at this moment was not in line with what his Father wanted. Following the Father's will led Jesus to an agonizing death and unimaginable separation from God. Jesus was fully aware of that, yet he still professed his conviction that God's will was best. Although no human will ever know the depth of suffering that Jesus faced in that quiet garden, his statement in this moment of decision should be every leader's response to the Almighty God. Vernon Grounds calls this attitude of obedience "the Gethsemane mindset" (p. 42).*

The Gethsemane mindset is the attitude of trustful self-surrender demonstrated by Jesus as he prayed to the Father, "Not as I will, but as you will." It is the renunciation of our own human feelings, desires, hopes, dreams and ambitions so that God's purposes may be accomplished. We develop this mindset as we follow Jesus' example. We set our minds on doing the will of God, obeying him even though obedience involves denying self and surrendering anything that would interfere with the fulfillment of the divine purpose. We do this in the confidence that, as we follow our Lord's example, we are going to experience beyond loss and loneliness and pain the joy and blessing and glory which mean unimaginable self-fulfillment.

Jesus Christ ultimately fulfilled his glorious purpose only through obedience to his Father. The ultimate test of any leader is his willingness to obey the same Father to whom Jesus entrusted himself. Comment?

God is unchanging and always present. Living for him is foundational to integrity -- and it reaps an eternal reward.