

OBEDIENCE

Objective

To learn about obedience from a Christian perspective and to understand how it fulfills the law of love.

References

1. Holy Scripture
2. The Ladder of Divine Ascent by St. John Climacus

Scriptural Verse

“You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.” John 15:14

Lesson Outline

- ❖ What does “to obey” mean? It is to submit one’s will to someone else’s authority
- ❖ Why is it so important?
- ❖ Without it, chaos would reign, businesses, churches and monasteries would suffer from lack of organization and would fail. However, a lack of obedience also means that people would not be able to grow and learn from one another.
- ❖ Obedience is an important aspect of our faith but it is overlooked many times.
- ❖ Every Christian must practice obedience because it is simply what the Lord Jesus Christ did Himself. He came to Earth to fulfill the will of the Father. John 5:30.
- ❖ The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the will of the Father because He loved the Father. So He willingly obeyed till the point of death. The Father also loved the Son’s obedience. At His baptism, His voice was heard saying: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” (Please read in John 17:23).
- ❖ Another example would be the following story:

The story of Abba Sylvanus and his beloved disciple:

Abba Sylvanus had in Scete a disciple whose name was Mark, and that he possessed to a great degree the faculty of obedience; he was a scribe, and the old man loved him greatly for his obedience. Now Sylvanus had eleven other disciples, and they were disturbed because they saw that the old man loved Mark more than them, and when the old men who were in Scete heard of this they were also troubled about it.

One day when they came to him to reprove him about this, Sylvanus took them, and went forth, and passing by the cells of the brethren, he knocked at the door of each cell, and said, "O brother, come forth, for I have need of thee." And he passed by all their cells, and not one of them obeyed him quickly.

But when they went to the cell of Mark, he knocked at the door and said, "Brother Mark," and as soon as Mark heard the voice of the old man, he jumped up straightway and came out and Sylvanus sent him off on some business.

Then Sylvanus said to the old men, "My fathers, where are the other brethren?" And they went into Mark's cell, and looked at the quire of the book which he was writing, and they saw that he had begun to write one side of the Greek letter "omega" (o) and that as soon as he heard the voice of his master, he ran out and did not stay to complete the other side of the letter. Now when the old men perceived these things, they answered and said unto Sylvanus, "Verily, old man, we also love the brother whom thou lovest, for God also loveth him."

So we see that obedience is fundamental to Christianity because it fulfills the law of love. Not only does the disciple show love to his master but the master also shows love to his disciple. Our Lord says that we will be called friends and not servants if we obey – John 15:14-15.

God cherishes the obedience of His children so much that it is worth more than sacrifice - 1 Samuel 15:22.

Another aspect of obedience is that involves crucifying the ego. It means letting go of my will and my opinion and accepting someone else's even if it means my discomfort, or my time.

Mother Syncretica said: I think that for those living in community, obedience is a greater virtue than chastity, however perfect. Chastity carries within it the danger of pride, but obedience has within it the promise of humility.

This is difficult in today's world because we are taught to question authority and take matters in our own hands. Obedience is viewed by the world as a sign of weakness. According to many social psychologists, those who obey are people with low self-esteem or high self-doubt. However, the church fathers view obedience as the first step in the pathway to holiness because it sets the ground for other virtues to grow such as patience, trust and humility.

The Bible tells that obedience starts when we are very young and it continues till we die:

- ❖ Our parents – Ephesians 6:1-3.
- ❖ Our bosses – Colossians 3:22.
- ❖ Our spouses – Ephesians 5:22 – 28. A huge component of obedience is trust. When wives show their husbands trust through obedience, they gain their husband's love, and respect.
- ❖ Our spiritual father – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.
- ❖ Those in authority – 1 Peter 2:13-14.

Another reason for our lack of obedience is that we get hung up on the faults of those we are supposed to obey and therefore discredit their authority. The church fathers however were a perfect example of blind obedience. They never judged their fathers and considered their words as if coming from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, regardless of how petty a task they were given.

Conclusion

As Christians we are taught to obey because in doing so we are emulating the Lord Jesus Christ and reflecting His love. According to one of the church fathers, there are three kinds of people who will be great in heaven: a sick person thankful for his illness, an ascetic in the wilderness, and a disciple who is obedient to his master.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. Can you give examples of times that you had to obey some one's wishes even though they didn't make sense?
2. Is there a limit to obedience? If so, then where do you draw that line?