

Msg #176 of Scripture Beneath The Surface
“Learning Obedience”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about learning obedience. The obedience I'm talking about is learning to obey God. Now, your first reaction is probably that obeying God is just one basic thing that all Christians have to do. And in a sense, you're right. But what I'd like to do today is get down a little deeper and get to the understanding of just how obedience plays a role in God's plan for this earth, and for you and I.

But let's go back and start at the beginning in Genesis. We know, as all Christians know, that in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were told not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of course, Eve ate the fruit, and thereby committed the first sin.

Now, let's take a close look and see what actually happened. In Genesis, chapter 3, we read that the serpent came to tempt Eve, tempting her to eat the fruit that was forbidden. In verses two and three, it specifically explains that Eve was aware of God's command not to eat the fruit, for she told the serpent that God had said they were not to eat the fruit of that tree, because they would die.

Now, we know that the lie Satan used was to tell Eve that if she ate the fruit, she would not die, and essentially, in other words, God was not telling the truth. Now, as I said, we know the story. Eve ate of the forbidden fruit. But she only did this after she looked at it and pondered the situation. And this is what I want you to zero in on today. Pay particular attention to what Eve

did prior to actually eating the fruit. The Bible says that she saw that the tree had fruit that was good to eat, and also noticed that the fruit was pleasant to look at, and thirdly, she perceived that according to the serpent's words, eating the fruit would make her wise. Now, as I said, pay particular attention. What Eve was actually doing was reasoning in her own mind whether or not she should eat the fruit. Now, she had already explained to the serpent that God had said they were not to eat the fruit. And yet, she still reasoned in her own mind whether she should eat the fruit or not. What she actually did was to question God's authority, comparing God's commandment with the word of the serpent. She was making a judgment. And because she perceived that the fruit was good to eat, pleasant to see, and a fruit to make a person wise, she began to make a determination whether or not to obey God's command.

Okay. Think about this. Instead of just accepting God's leadership as the complete and final authority, she questioned it. Now, we know, as Christians, that God is perfect. We know that God never makes a mistake, and that whenever he gives us direction, he knows it's the best thing for us. In other words, it would seem to be a silly thing to question God. But that's exactly what Eve did. She questioned in her own mind whether what God had told her was true or not. She questioned God's judgment. She questioned whether God's direction to her and Adam was really the proper intelligent thing to do.

Now, you may not think this is such a big deal. As humans, we do it all the time. We question authority all the time. Whether it's our supervisor, whether it's our governor, whether it's our husbands or parents, or whether it's other leaders in whatever situation we find ourselves, it is the natural state of man, woman, and child to second-guess authority. It is our natural response as human beings to react to authority by questioning the ability of those in leadership to make decisions properly.

We especially recognize this quality of second-guessing authority, in children, who always question their parents, when ever a decision is made that the child does not care for. Everyone is aware of seeing and hearing children who are what we call, headstrong. A headstrong child can sometimes be a holy terror. They are the worst kind of children for a babysitter, or a Sunday school teacher, or even for the parents themselves. However, children are not the only ones who are headstrong. Adults are usually headstrong also, in that they try to resist authority, almost at every turn.

I suppose you are aware, as well as I, of certain types of people who always resist authority. They're always complaining that those in leadership are stupid, dumber than dumb, and don't have the foggiest notion of how things should be done. We sometimes look at these people and call them, negative. I think you've seen these kind of people. They complain about everything. No matter what someone does, they disapprove. They're easily angered. They get angry when a politician does something dumber than dumb. They get angry at their wives for not being smart enough, or angry at their husbands for making poor decisions. They get angry at their bosses. In fact most workplaces are filled with what we would call, complainers, those people who always

complain that the boss is stupid, and that they themselves could do a much better job of running the place.

And the basic problem with complainers is not that they are necessarily wrong in their perspective. In fact, many times they are absolutely right. But whether they are right or wrong, they complain consistently, pointing their finger at everyone else, and saying that the other people are stupid. And just for the record, I think you can imagine what God thinks about that kind of behavior.

Anyway, this does not mean that Eve thought God was stupid. But on the other hand, Eve had the mistaken idea that God could be wrong. In fact, at the time Eve sinned, she had actually judged that for some reason, what God had told them about eating the fruit, was not a wise thing at all. She actually thought that she could be her own decision maker, that she could be her own authority, and use her own head to determine what was right and wrong. And that's exactly what she learned. She learned the difference between right and wrong.

Up until that time, Adam and Eve had no knowledge of evil. They listened to God, and walked with him, and talked with him, and accepted his direction, but they never looked at God as being good. He was God. He was just, God. He was not a good God, nor a bad God. He was just, God. Adam and Eve had not yet come to the knowledge that both good and evil existed. Not until they ate of that tree. What Eve learned, the wisdom she gained by eating the fruit, was to recognize that there were some things that were good and some things that were evil. She decided that the words of the serpent were good, and the words of God were evil. She chose for herself, deciding in her own mind that she would not follow the authority of God.

This was the first sin. Instead of just completely submitting to the authority of God whether they recognized the goodness of it or not, both Eve and Adam decided they could eat of the fruit in light of what God had told. As soon as they ate the fruit, they knew that they were naked. They were ashamed, and attempted to cover themselves with leaves.

Now, their nakedness was not the real problem. The real problem was that they had disobeyed in light of God's authority. They had made a decision, not based on God's word, but a decision based upon their own thinking in their own minds. They had set aside God's authority, and instead, decided to use their own head in the decision-making process. In essence, they were being headstrong. Just as children question the parents, Adam and Eve questioned God. They became headstrong, in the sense they followed their own head instead of following the headship of God.

You see, in this world we humans do not understand what it means to learn obedience. In Hebrews, chapter 5, it says that Jesus Christ learned obedience. This doesn't mean that he made mistakes and had to learn how to be obedient, but that he practiced obedience to perfection. In fact Jesus himself tells us in the Bible that he did not speak his own words, but only the words of the father. He also says that the works he did were the Father's works. Now, if anyone was able

to make good decisions, Jesus was able to make good decisions. Yet, when he walked this earth he only did the works of the Father, and only spoke the words of the Father. He didn't concentrate on making his own decisions, but just took the position of being a son, obeying the Father. As it says in Hebrews, he learned obedience.

And that's what we humans are doing now. We are on this earth learning not to be headstrong, but learning to be obedient. You see, God never makes mistakes. And whenever God tells us something, we should obey his words. We should never question him as to whether what he asks of us is good or bad, because whether we understand his reasoning or not, we should still just be obedient. But we are a headstrong people. We have a very difficult time allowing Jesus Christ to be the head.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3, it tells us that the head of Christ is God, the head of man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man. Now, I dealt with the subject, in message #175, of woman's subjective role to man. But today I want to concentrate on just the idea of what it means for Christ to be your head. If you have Christ as your head, then Christ makes your decisions for you. If Christ is your head, then you submit yourself to his leadership. If you do not submit yourself to the leadership of Christ, then he is not your head, and you are considered to be headstrong, in the sense that you want to make your own decisions, and don't want Christ to lead you. If you are headstrong, if you have not made Christ the head of you, then you have decided that you can make decisions more wisely than he can. And this is exactly why God instituted his line of authority in the Garden of Eden.

Up until the time Eve sinned, and Adam followed suit, there was no question about following God's authority. However, as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, God instituted a new system. Instead of Adam and Eve being able to follow a God who always makes perfect decisions, God instituted a system whereby both man and woman would learn obedience by submitting themselves to authority which was not perfect. Adam and Eve, and everyone else who came after them, would have to learn to be obedient to authority by being placed under persons of authority who were wrong a good portion of the time. Humans would be required to obey authority even when that authority made stupid decisions, and even when that authority didn't have the sense God gave a goose.

You see, the task we humans have been saddled with is to learn to submit ourselves to God's authority. We have to learn obedience. God is not asking us to learn to obey once we approve decisions someone else makes, but we are to learn to obey decisions just because they are made by those who God has ordained to have power. It's easy to obey someone's authority when you trust their judgment explicitly. But it's not easy at all to submit yourself to authority just because that person is the authority, recognizing that it is God who placed them there. We humans always try to use our own head and second-guess decisions by others. God wants us to learn obedience, and to do this, he is teaching us by having us become subject to the authority of one another, to other human beings like us who are fallible.

No, I'm not suggesting in any way to submit yourself to authority that is contrary to God's will. I'm not suggesting that you should not question authority when those in authority do evil. However, what I am suggesting is that if the leadership that we find ourselves under makes decisions that are poor, but not contrary to God's word, then we should submit ourselves anyway, just because of God.

You see, Romans 13:1 tells us that there is no power but of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore, God is the only power. He has given authority to different people, and even given some authority to Satan to act deceptively. And Daniel 4:17, tells us that God has even given power to some of the basest of men. And he doesn't give men who are base, who are wicked, power, because they make good decisions, but because they fulfill his will of helping us to learn obedience.

There is no power except that which God has, and that which he ordains. Therefore, when we obey anyone who has the authority over us, we are actually obeying God. We don't serve our governors or our supervisors because we respect them, but we serve them because we respect the power that God has ordained in them. When we see leadership making poor decisions which affect us, and yet we still remain obedient, we are learning to be obedient to God's authority. We are learning obedience. Adam and Eve failed the test of obedience. Every human being since Adam and Eve has also failed the test. We're no better than they are. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We have all made the mistake of using our own head to make decisions instead of Jesus Christ being our head.

You know, the concept of being beheaded for Jesus Christ is not well understood. When someone refers to being beheaded for Christ, everyone automatically assumes the guillotine. They think in terms of the physical removal of the person's head. But notice, when Christians are born again, the Bible says that we put on Christ. It says that we become members of the body of Christ, and it emphasizes that the head of the body is Christ, not us. Unless we are beheaded, and allow Christ to be our head, we will continue to make the same mistakes of resisting authority. We will continue to make the same mistakes of trying to use our own head to determine our decisions. But there is only one hope for mankind, and that is to learn obedience and allow Jesus Christ to be the head of the body and to let his Holy Spirit guide us into what is right and what is wrong.

This is why 1 Corinthians 11:3, tells us that the head of man is Christ. We cannot make the mistake over and over again of falling into the temptation to second-guess God. Remember, Romans 13 tells us that there is no authority except that power that God ordains. We are not learning to respect the poor decisions of our supervisors, the poor decisions of the husbands, or the poor decisions of the parents, but we are learning to recognize that the only authority, the only power, is God himself, and we are in the process of learning to respect him enough to submit ourselves to the authority which he assigns, whether we like it or not.

In the book of Jude, we read about Michael the Archangel disputing with the devil. And it says that Michael dared not bring a railing accusation against Satan. Now, an angel has no power of his own. The only power Angels have is that power which God gives. If Michael the Archangel was acting according to the direction of God, he would have all the power he needed. When it says that Michael the Archangel dared not to bring that railing accusation against Satan, it was not because Michael was afraid of Satan. What Michael was afraid of was God. For if Michael had brought a railing accusation against Satan, Michael would have been doing the same thing that Eve did in the Garden of Eden. He would have been following his own mind as to what should be done with the devil. But you see, God has the power. And if Satan can do something, it is only because God has allowed him to. It is only because God has ordained Satan to have that power. Satan can have no power of his own, but can only have that power which God allowed him to have. Therefore if Michael had come against Satan by his own choice, Michael would have, in essence, been going against God himself. If God ordained that Satan have power, then who was Michael the Archangel to try to take that power away from him?

Yet, it is this very thing that humans have been doing since the foundation of the earth. It started in the Garden of Eden, and has continued since. Mankind is in the process of learning obedience, until he recognizes that there is no power but of God, and recognizes that we will never figure out all the reasons God has for his commandments, and until we still submit ourselves to authority, knowing that all authority is given by God.

No, the decisions of supervisors and presidents and husbands and parents the worldwide over are much less than perfect. But when we practice obedience in a state of humbleness even when we recognize the poor decisions of our leaders, we are bringing glory to God. By our humbleness, by our submission to authority, we are demonstrating our trust that God knows what he's doing. In this life, if we expect to have life eternal, then we must learn obedience. We cannot remain just negative people, complaining about everyone else's decisions. We must come to the place where we recognize God's complete power and authority over all things and all people, and learn to submit ourselves as unto Christ. We will not be held responsible for the poor decisions of our leaders, but we will be held responsible for refusing to be beheaded. It is only by removing our own headship, and allowing Jesus Christ to be our head, that we will finally learn what obedience is all about.

You see, if we only obey authority after we have determined that they have made the right decisions, then we actually haven't obeyed authority at all. What we've actually done is that we have obeyed our own minds, and followed our own convictions, and therefore, we have only obeyed our own authority. The only way we can actually be obedient to authority is to obey that authority without second-guessing it. If we fall into the trap of submitting to authority only after we approve of the decisions, then essentially we will be doing exactly the same thing Satan did by following his own head instead of submitting himself to God's perfect authority.