

We begin with two stories about obedience:

Neil Marten, a member of the British Parliament, was once giving a group of his constituents a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament. During the course of the visit, the group happened to meet Lord Hailsham, then lord chancellor, wearing all the regalia of his office. Hailsham recognized Marten among the group and cried, "Neil!" Not daring to question or disobey the "command," the entire band of visitors promptly fell to their knees!

John Kenneth Galbraith, a prominent economist in his day, wrote in his autobiography, *A Life in Our Times*, about the devotion of Emily Gloria Wilson, his family's housekeeper:

"It had been a wearying day, and I asked Emily to hold all telephone calls while I had a nap. Shortly thereafter the phone rang. Lyndon Johnson was calling from the White House.

"Get me Ken Galbraith. This is Lyndon Johnson."

"He is sleeping, Mr. President. He said not to disturb him."

"Well, wake him up. I want to talk to him."

"No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you." When I called the President back, he could scarcely control his pleasure. "Tell that woman I want her here in the White House."

In our emphasis on the grace and love of God, we sometimes forget that we are supposed to obey Him. We are to do what He commands and avoid what He forbids. The Christian life is not only a matter of comfort and help. It is also a matter of daily obedience, of humbling ourselves, and persevering through suffering. In fact, the apostle Peter equates obeying God with humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand. Peter's words are a vivid call for a renewal of our obedience.

If "life is difficult," obedience is even more so. This really comes to bear in the relationship between child and parent. Every conscientious parent knows how hard it is to exercise their God-given authority over their children. The delicate balance of being tough yet tender is not easy to maintain. I'm reminded of the mother who wanted to have the last word, but couldn't handle the hassle that resulted whenever she said 'no' to her young son. After an especially trying day, she threw up her hands and shouted, "All right, Billy, do whatever you want. Now let me see you disobey THAT!"

The idea of obedience is at odds with human nature. We are much more in tune with the philosophy: "Nobody's going to tell me what to do," and we bring this into our relationship with God, without even thinking about it. If I were being obedient to God, I would be ready and willing to take a servant's posture in my relationships with others. How are you doing with that? If I were being obedient to God, I would be forgiving others with the forgiveness I have received from Jesus. How is that working for you? If I were being obedient to God, I would be intentionally putting Him first in every area of my life—no exclusions. We are more than happy to receive God's love and His blessings and answered prayers, but then to actually obey Him? To humble ourselves by doing things God's way instead of our own? Come on now; let's not get crazy!

But when it comes to obedience, there's nothing crazy about it. What's crazy is thinking that we can ignore God and live life on our own terms and everything's going to be fine. Thinking that we know better

than God gets right to the heart of what sin is. So, from time to time, God will let us learn the hard way that we are pretty lousy at His job. We find evidence of this everywhere, even places like the football field.

Roger Staubach, who led the Dallas Cowboys to the World Championship in 1971, admitted that his position was a source of trial for him. You see, Coach Tom Landry called every single play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run, and when to hand off. Only in emergency situations could he change the play (and he had better be right!). Even though Roger considered Coach Landry to have a "genius mind" when it came to football strategy, his pride said that he should be able to run his own team.

In this respect, we are no different than that Hall of Fame quarterback. Pride says: I should be able to run my own team. Pride says: I should be able to run my own life. Pride says: No one is going to tell me when to run or when to pass. No one is going to call the plays for me. I'm smart enough to figure this out on my own. No one is going to tell me what to do.

Here's where we have frightening, terrible power, because God will not force you to obey Him. If you want to reject His coaching, He will let you. If you don't want Him to call the plays, He won't. That also means He will let you deal with the consequences of your decision, and they won't be good. At their most benign, you'll have an aching emptiness inside that can't be filled no matter how hard you try; the more malignant consequences include the destruction of marriages and families; substance abuse; isolation; violence; hatred of oneself and others. But hey, you wanted to call the shots.

Thanks be to God that His opinion of us does not rest on how well we obey Him! In order to change rebellious hearts; in order to change you and me, He practiced perfect obedience. Jesus humbled Himself by becoming human. God the Creator became God the creature. Jesus gave up the holiness of heaven for the burden of this world. He obeyed the law of love without a mistake. And in perfect obedience to His Father's plan, He laid down His perfect life as a sacrifice on the cross. Jesus was horrified at the thought of having his skin lashed open and having nails driven into His body and so he prayed in agony, "Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want." And then He walked right into that suffering. This is the obedience that saves you. This is the obedience that offers you redemption, not your obedience, but Jesus' obedience. His perfect life, sacrificed on the cross and raised again, will cover the debt of your sin. Just believe that it counts for you, and it counts for you. God credits your account with full forgiveness.

Back to Roger Staubach. The Cowboys quarterback who chafed at the idea of the coach calling all the plays later said, "I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory."

If there is a "secret" to obedience, that is it. Sinful human nature tells me that obedience is somehow going to hurt me or hold me back. But let this new idea open up to you: Once you learn to obey God, there is harmony, fulfillment, and victory. Trusting fully in the obedience of Jesus, I can now see that obedience to God brings blessing into my life. When you do things God's way, good things happen, and you feel better. That's no accident! And that isn't to say that all your problems will disappear when you obey God; in fact, there may be a personal cost to pay for your obedience to the way of Christ. The apostle Peter was up-front about that when he wrote: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." But even so, when I look at how Jesus obeyed His Father, and what that obedience did for me, I am moved to pray, "Father do what you want, not what I want. Help me to want what you want. Cause me to live in harmony with you. Give me the fulfillment of living life your way. Be merciful to me and share your Son's victory with me. Help me to trust and obey."