

July 26
Obedience, Daily Disciple, page 216

[Psalm 56:12-13](#)

[Joshua 24:22-24](#)

Digging Deeper: Finding out, discussion and sharing

1. What is your definition of “obedience”?
2. Read Psalm 56:12-13. Why do you think Gary Holloway selected this Psalm to go along with our theme of “obedience”? What basic insight do these verses provide about the fundamental nature of obedience?
3. Have you ever heard of the expressions: “Inward righteousness” and “outward righteousness”? How do we express this thought today?
4. How is inward righteousness defined in the meditation?
5. How is outward righteousness defined in the meditation?
6. Read Joshua 24:22-24. When Joshua challenged the people to serve the Lord, he admonished them to do the following two things:
 - a. Put away the foreign gods among you (what does this mean?)
 - b. Incline your hearts to the Lord (what does this mean?)
7. Discuss how our hearts are involved in obedience.
8. How is our will involved in obedience?
9. Discuss how attitudes and motivation are involved in obedience.
10. Give examples from his life that show Joshua’s obedience.
11. What is there about our own will that makes it so hard to submit?
12. What difference will it make in church life if we conceive of obedience as fundamentally listening to hear the voice of the Lord?
13. How can we listen submissively? This assumes that it is possible to listen without being submissive. Can you identify obstacles that keep us from hearing the voice of the Lord?
14. Why is persuasion a key element of obedience?
15. What are some “things” that we have traditionally connected with the concept of obedience?
16. Give a couple of examples in Abraham’s life where it is evident that he trusted God, and it was played out in his obedience.
17. Discuss this statement by Augustine: *“The law of sin is the force of habit by which the mind is hauled off and held against its will.”* (Confessions, “The Attractions of Sin,” Book 8.5.12).
18. Why is it hard for us to depend upon the mercy and grace of God?
19. Share the song “Trust and Obey.”
20. What does this song say about obedience that we need to be daily reminded about?

OBEDIENCE

Meaning of Obedience. I am fascinated by the fact that the word “obey” in Joshua 24:22-24 comes from the Hebrew word *שמע* (*shamea*) that basically means to hear, or listen to. The Greek Septuagint carries the same meaning with the people promising to “hear the voice of the Lord.” This fundamental notion of obedience is critical because of how most of us probably think of the word. For many the idea of obedience is “doing what you are told.” What this degenerates into is a resentful heart that responds out of a sense of duty and only half-hearted at that. As long as the job gets done that is all that matters. But we want to challenge this inadequate view. If we could think of obedience

as first listening and expectantly waiting to hear the voice of the Lord, it changes everything! Obedience is not about first doing, it is first about waiting and listening to hear the voice of the Lord.

The New Testament picks up on this dynamic of obedience and improves upon it in two ways: obedience is literally to “listen submissively,” and “to be persuaded.” Attitudes and motivation are involved in obedience. (see my article on [“An Apologia for the Unpersuaded”](#) regarding how unbelief is fundamentally not being persuaded.)

Joshua as an example of Obedience. When we think of Joshua and his leadership role with Israel as a nation, his fundamental stance of obedience with God is a key component. Three times in chapter one of the book of Joshua God commands Joshua to “be strong and courageous, and be careful to obey.” God reassures Joshua that His presence will be with him wherever he goes. This will assuage the problem of discouragement. God gives his people strength, courage and the divine presence when their hearts are bent toward obeying Him. It is these divine gifts that combat the problem of discouragement.

Obedience and faithfulness. Too often the traditional view of obedience by Christians is the notion that obedience is our doing certain things so that we can either be considered faithful or unfaithful. Obedience is basically not about the doing of the thing we envision. Rather, it is fundamentally about our covenant relationship with God. In the Old Testament and New Testament the concept of obedience is always encouraged by God from the standpoint of covenant faithfulness and fidelity. Think about Abraham when God called him to pick up his tent pegs and go to a new land. God did not provide him with a Trip-Tik or a GPS device ahead of time to let him know where he was going. I see Abraham’s willingness to go as rooted in his deep-seated trust of God. Abraham knew down deep that God was asking him to do something that would be for his good. Because of his covenant relationship with God, he trusted (with an obedient heart) and took his family and belongings with him.

Obedience and surrender of the will. In my estimation, the most difficult part about obedience has to do with the surrender of our will. Go back and look at our earlier study on “Surrender” for small groups on July 12. Obedience cannot be a reality with our heart, attitudes and motivation, if the will is not surrendered. Augustine wrestled often in his works about human nature and its surrender to the will of God. T. Kermit Scott maintains that for Augustine “*the proper religious attitude is one of total submission, surrender of the will and absolute dependence on the mercy and grace of God*” (Augustine: His Thought in Context. 1995. Paulist Press, page 138). It is the absolute dependence on the mercy and grace of God that trips us all up. We think often of the reception of mercy and grace, and that is easy talk about. However, absolute dependence on these two things is another matter! Because our will is strong enough and deceptive enough to surrender itself only partially, then we still can reserve some will for ourselves!

Songs in our hymnody. Probably the most sung hymn with this theme obedience is “Trust and Obey.” The refrain encourages us to “*Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*” If indeed there is no other way to be happy, then why do we resist trusting and obeying? Perhaps we are not convinced that this is the path to true happiness. For most of us we go down life’s pathway taking every side-road available, searching and never finding that happiness and peace. It is our walk with the Lord, daily trusting and obeying that provides such inner stability.