

Convenient Obedience

The troubled citizens of Judah gathered before the prophet Jeremiah with a single request. "Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) that the Lord thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do." (Jeremiah 42:2-3). When they were told by Jeremiah that he would go to God on their behalf, they answered, "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God." In short, Judah said to Jeremiah, "Go to God on our behalf, ask Him what we should do and we'll do whatever He says."

Ten days later Jeremiah returned with God's reply. He wanted them to stay in the land and go with the Babylonians when they arrived. In spite of their desire to run away to Egypt where they felt they would be safe, they were told by God that their safety would lie in their remaining in Judah and that they would in fact rush headlong toward destruction if they fled to Egypt (Jeremiah 42:7-18). God made his message clear. "O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day." (Jeremiah 42:19).

That message was certainly simple enough, wasn't it? The trouble was that it was not the message the people of Judah wanted to hear. "Then spake Azariah the son of Hoshai, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, "Thou speakest falsely: the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there." (Jeremiah 43:2).

The people came to Jeremiah, pleading for direction from God. Jeremiah provided that Divine direction. Judah didn't want to hear what God had to say. They wanted God to say what they wanted to hear. A continued reading in the book of Jeremiah will show that they made the wrong choice in fleeing to Egypt.

This event in the history of Judah brings to mind the danger of convenient obedience; doing what God says only as long as we want to do it. How well I remember a discussion with a gentleman regarding scriptural music in New Testament worship. He contended that the mechanical instruments he used in his worship to God were acceptable. I showed him from the New Testament that they were not. His final words to me on the subject were, "Well, I like the piano." And that was that as far as he was concerned. Anyone who has taught the Gospel has had similar experiences.

People enjoy the Bible verses that deal with love, joy, peace and hope. Most don't even mind passages like the "Golden Rule" (Matthew 7:12) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) that teach about helping others and being a good neighbor. Like the rich ruler of Mark 10:17-22, they'll do the things they want to do or like to do. But bring up the verses that show how we are to worship in an acceptable manner, what one must do to be saved from sin, etc. and suddenly, in the minds of some there's something wrong. I recall talking to one lady about immersion. She didn't believe it was necessary for salvation. I opened the Bible to Romans 6:3-4 and asked her to read the verses. She read them out loud. I asked, "Do you believe that?" She put her finger on the verses and answered, "I believe what that says but I don't believe what you're saying." I hadn't said anything! I let God's Word do the talking, but she didn't want to hear what He had to say.

The Lord has not given us the option of obeying when it's convenient for us. If we really want to know His will and really want to go to heaven then our mindset will be like that of Jesus in the Garden when He prayed, "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42).

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