

## The Encouragement of Obedience

We all know that the Bible clearly teaches we must obey God in order to go to heaven (Matthew 7:21). The first and foremost priority in our lives should be obedience to the Lord (Mark 8:36). We obey because we want to live eternally with God (II Timothy 4:7-8). Have you ever stopped to consider, though, that while your obedience leads to your eternal salvation, it also influences others to be stronger and more faithful? It's true. Just as DISobedience discourages and weakens, obedience encourages and strengthens.

In Acts 4:3 we read of the apostles being hauled into custody for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In spite of this, we read in the next verse, "Howbeit many of them believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." In the verses that follow we find the apostles standing before the Jewish rulers, very plainly and boldly proclaiming God's truth. Having concluded the message and having been threatened by the rulers to cease this preaching, the apostles spoke up and contrarily declared, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20). In other words, these brethren would not allow anyone to stop them from preaching the Gospel. They were resolute in their obedience and when they were reunited with the other Christians in Jerusalem, the church grew, no doubt greatly encouraged by the faithfulness of the apostles (Acts 4:31).

In Acts 5:18 we again find the apostles being taken and, in this case, put into "the common prison." Again they were told to stop preaching the Gospel (Acts 5:28). Again the apostles stood firm in their obedience, led by Peter who answered their detractors with the words, "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). Again, the apostles were released, though not before they were physically beaten (Acts 5:40). In response to the beating and threats of the Jewish leaders, the apostles "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." (Acts 5:41-42). Their bold obedience continued to influence the church and the church grew (Acts 6:7).

Whether it's a Christian coming forward to repent of disobedience and express his or her intentions to live more faithfully to God or a lost soul stepping out to put on the Lord in immersion (Romans 6:4), each individual who shows a determination to obey God provides a tremendous amount of encouragement for the rest of us. Their tender hearts cause us to stop and think about our souls. Their acts of submissiveness to God remind us that we too must "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up." (James 4:10). Their obedience renews our focus on things eternal (Matthew 6:33). Just as the steadfast obedience of those brethren in Acts 4 and 5 encouraged the church in Jerusalem and led to its spiritual and numerical growth, so too can obedience today can lead to the same results.

It's easy to get lulled into spiritual complacency. Day after day brings the same routine. We go through the motions of daily life. Then something hits us square between the eyes; a threat of loss or an actual tragedy. We're forced to take a stand. Our faith is under attack. Which way will we go? Will we allow the fiery darts of Satan to wound and cripple us or will we square our jaw and recommit ourselves to faithful obedience to our Savior? By doing the latter, we demonstrate care for our own souls, but we in turn cause others to draw closer to God. By watching our determined obedience, even in the face of hardship, the strong become stronger and the weak take on a new determination of their own. Yes, our obedience encourages just as surely as our disobedience discourages. Be faithful, Christian! Grow stronger in the faith every day. Your diligence will lead you to heaven and will most certainly aid others on their path there as well.

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