

LESSON 1.D

THE MEASURE OF OBEYING AUTHORITY

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” (1 Peter 2:13-14) “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20)

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)

1. Submission is a matter of attitude, while obedience is a matter of conduct. Thus, submission is absolute, but obedience is relative. In God often times, what we believe to be right or wrong does not matter. Be careful in judging absolutes.

2. Slavery today is wrong in the eyes of man, but in the Bible slavery was okay. Paul even exhorted slaves to be obedient to their masters.

“Servants, (slaves) be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness (one vision and focus) of your heart, as unto Christ;” (Ephesians 6:5)

The issue was not the slavery, but the submission of the slaves. The submission in their heart. At the heart of every issue is an issue of my heart. Often times with issues of the heart we get off track.

3. In Acts 4:19, their spirit was not rebellious, since they submitted to those in authority. Obedience however cannot be absolute. Some authorities must be obeyed; while others should not be, especially in matters which touch on things of God and sharing the gospel. We can question, suggest, and reply to authorities, yet we must never show an unsubmitive attitude. Submission must be absolute.

4. One who knows authority will be soft and tender. They will be absolute in their submission in heart, (in attitude) in word, and action. Even if they disagree. There is be no sign of harshness or rebellion.

5. Thus, when delegated authority (men who represent God’s authority) and direct authority (God Himself) are in conflict, one can render submission but not obedience to the delegated authority. When Jesus stood before Pilate there was great resistance in Him. But the Bible said,

“He opened not His mouth.” In silence He gave great resistance. He submitted, but did not obey Pilate.

6. So here are the Spiritual principles:

A. Obedience is related to conduct, it is relative. Submission is related to our heart attitude and is absolute.

B. God alone receives unqualified obedience without measure, any person lower than God can only receive qualified obedience.

C. Should the delegated authority issue an order clearly contradicting God’s command, we give submission but not obedience. We submit to the person God gave the authority to (submitting to God in reality), but we must disobey the order of God.

7. Now, how can we judge whether a person is obedient to authority?

A. A person who has known authority will naturally try to find authority wherever they go. Only Christian can really obey, and they too must learn to obey, not outwardly, but from their heart.

B. A person who has met God’s authority is soft and tender. They have been melted and is not able to be hardened. They are afraid of being wrong.

C. A person who “truly” knows authority never likes to be in authority. He does not take delight in giving counsel or controlling others. True obedience is always in fear of making error.

D. A person who knows authority keeps their mouth closed. He is under restraint. He dares not speak carelessly because there is in them a sense of authority.

E. A person who knows authority is sensitive to each act of lawlessness (iniquity or working outside the law) around them because they have a sense of righteousness and truth in them.

8. The church is maintained by two essentials: life and authority. The indwelling life we have received is a life of submission, enabling us to obey authority. Most matters of outward disobedience mostly are related to a lack of inward submission.

9. Paul in Ephesians share this important truth with us;

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:” (Ephesians 4:19)

The unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God seems to be still so far away yet it is not actually that far off is we have known authority.

10. The life we have received is not only for dealing with sin but more for obeying. When the spirit of rebellion leaves us then will the spirit of obedience be quickly restored to the church. And if all the church walk in this way of obedience the glorious fact of the unity of the faith will suddenly appear before our eyes.