

# OBEEDIENCE

The whole day seemed to be one challenge after another. Before school, Valerie's mother demanded she make her bed. Her chemistry teacher piled on the homework and refused Val's suggestion for an alternate project. Her parents would not permit her to go with friends to the lake that afternoon. In spite of the pouring rain, the policeman would not let her park in the lot closest to the shop where she worked. Her manager at Beauty Queen scheduled her on the Saturday she had requested to have off. And then when she got off work, her parents told her of the family reunion on Sunday afternoon that she must attend with them. Why did everyone else get to tell her what to do?



We prefer our own way.

We prefer to do as we jolly well please.

We do not welcome resistance, disagreement, or other suggestions.

Even when we are well past our teens, we are not happy when others plan our time and make decisions on our behalf.

The multiple demands of others—even if they are ultimately for our good—make us feel out of control. And we like control. We want power. We do not want to bend our will to anyone else. “You aren’t the boss of me,” we say, even if under our breath.

Let’s be honest. Pride is at the root of the trouble here. We serve and preserve our own interests. Pride, the sin of Satan, refuses to back down.

To be faithful in obedience, we must have victory over pride, revise our thinking about submission, and find real joy and protection in subjecting our will to those who have authority over us. We must subdue our fleshly desire for self-preservation and control.

## Faithfully Obey Your Parents

This is one of the first biblical principles a child learns. The fifth of the Ten Commandments underlines the requirement. *Children, obey, honor, and respect your parents.*

**Review a few of those places right now: Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20**

**What are the verbs (action words) in these verses? Are they synonyms? What are the rewards connected with these commands? Why is this commandment important? How does this commandment apply to adult children?**

Yes, you know it. But doing it is another story. Sometimes when children (especially teen-aged ones) obey, it is with eye-rolls and sighs. Sometimes it is two days later. Sometimes it is only by being dragged into it. They (and we) may fuss and fume and kick and scream the whole way. They (we) feel sorry for themselves (ourselves) and respond with anything but a Christian attitude.

Scripture doesn’t give us any excuses. It doesn’t say, “Obey your parents when they are right,” or “when they are reasonable.” It doesn’t say, “Obey if your parents are cool” or “Obey eventually.”

Obeying cheerfully, promptly, and willingly might give some parents a heart attack! But that is the expectation of Scripture.

**Give yourself a score on your adherence to this principle. What is your attitude about your parents? How has it changed during the course of your life?**

**What did Jesus teach about this command in Mark 7:5-13? Summarize the scriptural account in your own words. Whom was Jesus talking to? Remember that these men were known for their careful adherence to the law. What did Jesus think about their law-keeping?**

Do you remember Jephthah's daughter from Judges 11:29-40? Never mind about her father's rash vow, promising to sacrifice the first thing he saw when he returned home after defeating the Ammonites. No, he didn't consult with her. No, his offering was not reasonable. But what was his daughter's response? Immediate submission. Unquestioning obedience. That is faithfulness to honor a father's instruction.

Read the historical account in Judges 11:29-40. Write down three questions you'd like to ask about it. (You may find answers in some commentaries or ask some Bible scholars later!) List five words or phrases you would use to describe Jephthah's daughter. What was the tone of her response to her father? Did you hear any whining in her voice? If Jephthah were your father, would the story be different?

We are reluctant to enjoy this story because of the unfairness of Jephthah's vow. But the delight is in his daughter's willingness to obey. As much as we learn from Jephthah's rashness, we also learn from his daughter's submission. Though the story is shocking, it is a model for our own response, even when we feel we have no control.

You don't age out of the system. It doesn't stop when you turn 21 or graduate from college. Even when you become the caregiver for your aging parent, the principle of honor remains. We never outgrow it. The practice changes because of your maturity and your responsibility to your own family. But our parents should always command a place of honor in our lives. Obedience to our parents becomes the model for our obedience to others in authority over us. Our respect for their leadership prepares us to be respectful students and citizens and employees. We experience the consequences of disobedience in a family setting and hopefully will not face them in other settings. We learn to obey our Heavenly Father by obeying our earthly parents.

## **Faithful Obedience in Education and Jobs**

As women in the twenty-first century, we have all been affected by the feminist movement. We demand equal rights. We take "obey" out of our wedding vows. We think "submission" is a dirty word. Certainly, women should receive equal pay for equal work, should be given the opportunities for advancement that they earn, and should not be demeaned or abused by others. But obedience

remains part of our obligation in our education and workplace.

Since the culture of Bible times was different, we must operate on principles when considering our workplace relationships. Students should apply these principles to their school officials and teachers. "Students, do your homework" is not in the Bible. There's no chapter and verse that says, "Employees, submit to your boss," or "If you disagree with your supervisor, you should act in this way." Instead, there are some guiding lights, both in example and principle, that give direction about our attitudes and actions in the workplace or school.

**Summarize a principle from each of the passages below and interpret it for your employment and educational relationships:**

**Exodus 35:25-26**

**Exodus 35:30-35**

**Nehemiah 3:12**

**Romans 14:19**

**1 Corinthians 3:9**

**1 Corinthians 10:31-32**

**Ephesians 6:5-8**

**Colossians 3:17**

**Colossians 3:22-24**

**1 Timothy 6:1-2**

**Titus 2:9-10**

**1 Peter 2:18-21**

**Hebrews 13:17**

Our excellence, diligence, competence, and positivity in our work are testimonies to God's work in us. Your work and your attitude in the classroom or workplace should make it obvious that you are a believer.

## Faithfully Submit to the Government

The demand for faithful obedience continues to the government and your employer and your family. God's Word gives clear instruction for the citizens of this planet. This is not a cultural issue. It applies to all of us, regardless of where we live. It doesn't matter what our political party is or who the elected officials are.

Let's look at two passages. First read 1 Peter 2:13-17. Now try to keep the smile off your face when you think about the apostle Peter who wrote it—yes, the Peter who cut off the ear of the Temple guard (Luke 22:50). Yes, the Peter who was repeatedly arrested for speaking about Jesus and choosing to obey Him rather than men (Acts 5:17-42 and other places). Peter's inspired command in the Word of God is to be subject to the government, to fear God and honor the government officials.

**What two reasons does Peter give for Christians to be obedient to the government? Find them (both phrases start with the word "for") in verses 13 and 15.**

**What contradictory terms does Peter use in verse 16? How can you be free and a servant at the same time?**

Now carefully read Romans 13:1-7 and the admonition to obey political authorities. Paul did not write these instructions to safe and happy people in a government that supported and protected their freedom of worship. Remember Nero? Remember Caligula? This was the Roman empire that fed Christians to lions and burned them as torches. But Paul did not leave any wiggle room in his clear commands. Be subject to the governing authorities. That's pretty clear, isn't it?

**What reason did Paul give for obeying the government? (Again, it starts with "for" in verse 1.)**

What does he say is the ultimate effect of disobeying the government's authority (verse 2)?

How does he identify government officials in verses 4 and 6?  
 How does he sum up our obligation to government in verse 7?  
 Note that this is a matter of attitude as well as action.

Face it. Someone will always tell you what to do. No matter how wealthy or how powerful you may be, you will need to listen to someone else. They can tell you what to do, like it or not.

Perhaps you do not like to obey the governmental authorities about the traffic lights or speed limits in your area. Perhaps you do not like to submit to paying your taxes each year. Perhaps you don't want to take your shoes off when you go through the security check at the airport. Fine. But you will end up in jail. You will pay the consequences for disobedience. More than that, though, you will face God's wrath and you will violate your own conscience (Romans 13:5).

Is there ever a time when a Christian cannot obey the government? Yes. Again, both Peter and Paul are our examples. But both met the consequences of that disobedience, were incarcerated, and ultimately paid with their lives. If we must refuse obedience to the government God placed in authority over us, we must also recognize the decision will be costly. This world is not our home.

Can you imagine an instance where you would sacrifice freedom or position or even your life because you could not obey the government? What might that look like? We must be in prayer for those legislators in our country whose decisions have dramatic effect on our churches and families.

### **The Faithful Example of Jesus**


Jesus is our example of willing obedience. He gave Himself in submission to the cross. He paid the ultimate price. Though He

was an equal member of the Godhead, Christ humbled Himself and took on flesh. He became obedient, even to death. The Creator of the universe, the Author and Finisher of our faith, the Alpha and Omega, the Son of God stooped to say, “Yes, Sir.” He bent His will to that of the Father, accepted His assignment, and hung in humility on a cross.

**Matthew 26:36-42 describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. What is His repeated prayer and His repeated declaration of submission?**

**Philippians 2:1-11 is worth memorizing. Write down the phrases that describe the attitude of Jesus Christ (verses 6-8). Now make a list of the phrases that instruct you and me about our attitudes (especially in verses 2-5). Do your attitudes look like the attitudes of Jesus? How was Jesus rewarded for His obedience (verses 9-11)?**

With Jesus Christ as your example, follow humble obedience. This requires selflessness and submission. It means crucifying our pride, esteeming others better than ourselves. It is a deliberate choice to think and act like Jesus going contrary to the world's system.

We may see it as a great sacrifice. We may see it as a hard duty. But God sees it as obedience to Him—not just to parents or employers or policemen. Your faithful obedience points beautifully to the faithful obedience of Christ and causes your Heavenly Father to smile at you with great pleasure. “This is right.” “This pleases the Lord.” 

**About the Writer:** Carol Reid edits FUSION and FUSIONnext devotional magazines at Randall House Publications. She and her husband Garnett worship at The Donelson Fellowship (Nashville) where he serves as pastor of older adults. Carol loves books, bargain shopping, chocolate with nuts, and crafts; she does not love cleaning house.