

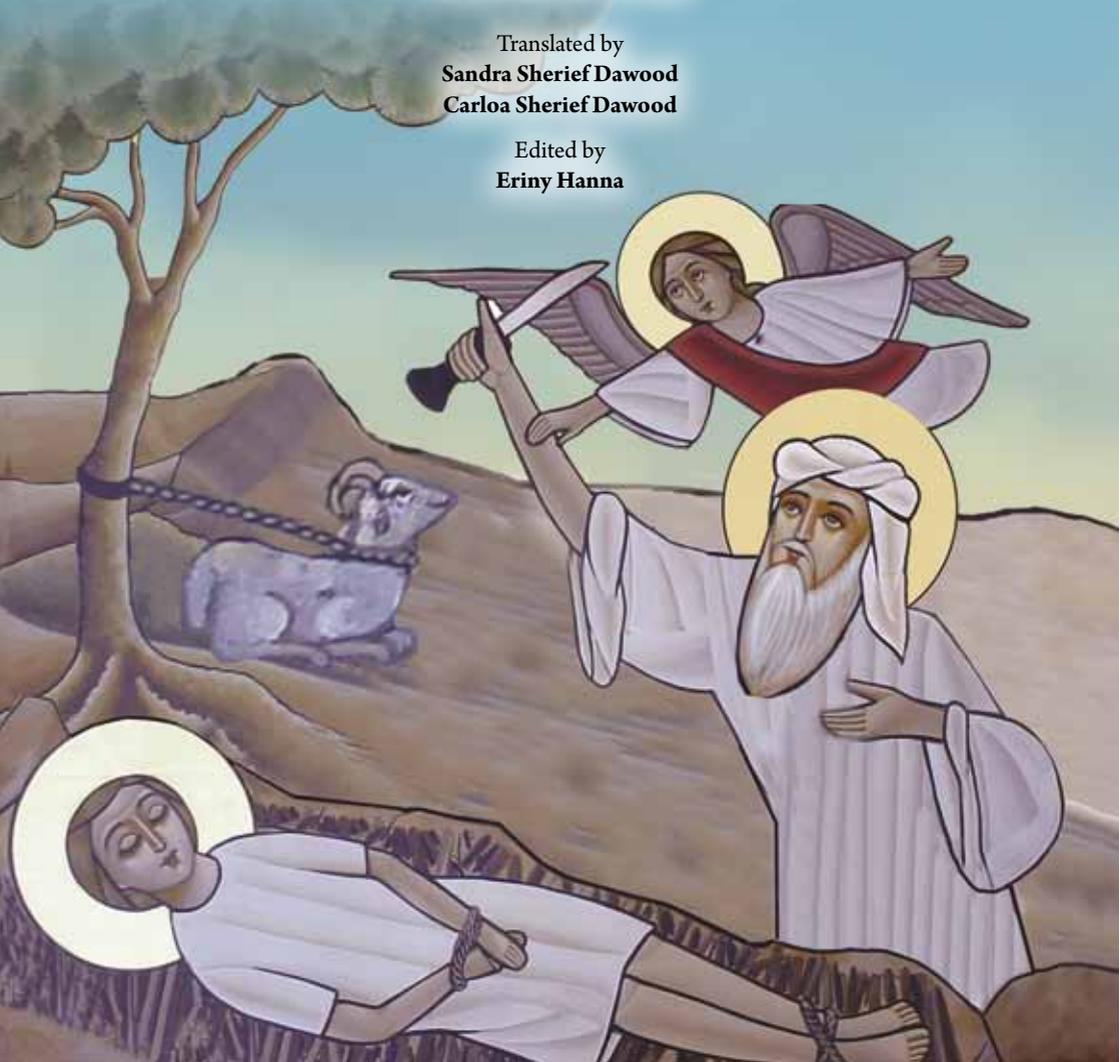


OBEDIENCE AND SOUND PERSONALITY

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OBEDIENCE: CONDESCENSION OR HUMILITY?!

A girl came to me to confess, complaining about herself. She was going to wear a dress she liked, and felt that it was the best dress that suited her. As she was going to put it on, her mother said that it was a beautiful dress. Without noticing, the girl picked up another dress. She asked me, "Why did I do this although I love my mother and trust her opinion?"

This girl's problem is a common problem even with adults, as we do not understand the meaning of obedience or the acceptance of other's opinion.

WHY OBEDIENCE?

We often find it hard to talk about obedience. For many people, especially the young, obedience is associated with a weak personality and submitting to others, as with parents, consultants or leaders at school, in the community, or even in the church. Many people see obedience as controlling others and forcing their opinions and experiences on them, which can cause feelings of being belittled or the desire to rebel. If these feelings are not shown through outward behavior or body language, they are nevertheless present in the mind.

- ❖ Now why does God ask for our obedience?
- ❖ Does obedience ignore the right of discussion?
- ❖ Does God accept blind obedience?
- ❖ And what is the aim of obedience? Do we live in humiliation?

These kind of questions pushed me to write about the great biblical obedience, and to correct the misconceptions about obedience.

FIRST LESSON THE WORLD OFFERS

A distraught mother came to me once telling me that she has a very kind child who went to daycare. On the first day when he came back home he did something wrong. So the mother told him, "Don't do this," and the boy answered, "No I will do it." The answer surprised her; this was usually not the boy's attitude. So kindly she told him, "This is wrong, don't do it." And the answer was: "No, I will do it. I said no."

The mother was afraid to lose her good relationship with her child, so she ignored what happened and stayed quiet. The next day, she asked the boy if he remembered what he did the day before, and he said yes. So she asked, "What do you think about your reaction?" He answered, "It was wrong." She said, "Why did you do this?" He told her, "Mom, you don't understand. If I said yes, you would have thought that I am weak!" The mother was surprised. The boy's first lesson in daycare was that obedience only means having a weak personality.

I told her to do something wrong in front of him, and when he tells her that her behavior is incorrect, she would stop doing it. After she had done so, she started a conversation with him. "Does it mean that when I listened to

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you, that I was weak?" The boy answered, "No, I loved you for listening to me." She said, "Obedience and compromises don't make us weak. On the contrary, they are signs of maturity and love."

WHO IS THE GREATEST?

Who is the greatest? The one who commands or the one who obeys?

Most of the time the answer is the one who commands.

This is why one refuses to obey, thinking that in this way he ensures his strength and independence.

In the Gospel of St. Luke, it was said that Jesus Christ "was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51). It means that He obeyed St. Mary and St. Joseph. Who is the greatest? The one who commands or the One who obeys? Jesus Christ or St. Mary and St. Joseph?

There is no comparison between the Incarnate Logos and the humans, St. Mary and St. Joseph. In spite of obeying them, He conversed with them with the spirit of power. When Virgin Mary blamed him saying, "Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you," (Luke 2:48) He answered, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). The Son talked to His mother in wisdom, kindness, and courage, declaring His Divinity. How strange is it that the creation gave orders and the Incarnate Creator obeyed! He offers us a new meaning of obedience.

Obedience does not destroy a person's personality nor does it offend his dignity. It does not make him inferior to the person who gives orders. But it shows a loving heart, mature thinking, and a life dedicated to the purpose of other's comfort rather than one's self.

Anyone seeking leadership must understand his duty and focus on accomplishing his goal, but not in commanding others. In this way, there is no desire for power and no fear of obeying and submitting.

Again, St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews states, "He, the Son, learned obedience from what He suffered." (Hebrews 5:8) This means that He the Son, Who is equal to His Father, obeyed until His death - the death of the cross - in order to carry us with Him to the heavenly road, the road of obedience. The obedience of the Son did not take away His equality with God the Father.

OBEDIENCE IS A SIGN OF MATURITY

Young, immature children repeat the phrase: "No. I said, 'No!'"

This is what most children start saying to ensure their independent personality. However, this attitude shows their immature thinking. Children do not understand their position, so they often get mad and angry.

But the wise mature man, realizing his message through the spirit of obedience, is capable of making others happy. He finds joy in their happiness; those are the signs of true maturity and greatness.



A PART OF JESUS CHRIST'S HEAVEN

Some wonder about the words of St. Paul, who constantly wrote and argued for the presence of the Trinity and the economy of the Father in saying, "Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. 15:28). Some might wonder: How does the Son obey the Father? Obedience here does not relate the human thinking, which has ruined the meaning of obedience and submission, but it is the way of obedience of our God.

The comfort and greatness of the soul is to share in Christ's humbleness and obedience, so as to find heavenly comfort in obedience. We do obey others, not because they are greater or because we need a favor, but to gain the blessing of sharing the gift of obedience with Jesus Christ.

WHO IS THE BOSS?

St. Pachomius was known for his strictness in the system of the communal life, as he established more than 10 monasteries in Upper Egypt and three nunneries. The number of monks in the main monastery in Phbow was about 1500 monks. He was the general father for all those monasteries.

One day, St. Pachomius was waiting for a group of hermits to meet him. His own disciple Theodore (Tadros) noticed that the father's clothes were old and inappropriate, since he was responsible for his clothes. So Theodore asked his father to change his clothes to meet the guests, but the father did not heed him. The disciple repeated over and over, but the father did not change his clothes. When the father thought of the manner, he went into his cell and cried heavily because of his disobedience to his disciple. He even admitted his sin in front of all the monks. Therefore, according to the founder of the communal system, there is a great loss in disobeying. Obedience in his mind is not a loss, but through love and enjoyment of the new life in Jesus Christ it becomes synonymous with wisdom and joy.

OBEDIENCE TOWARD OUR CHILDREN

We ask our children to obey, as if we are wise, experienced and have authority, while they lack experience and wisdom and have no right to negotiate. We have to teach our children how to obey through our obedience to them in what is right, and our conversation with them, with an understanding spirit and appreciation of their opinions. "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

OBJECTIONS AND DISOBEDIENCE

In early teenage years, many of our children practice disobedience, and we



complain that they object without reason. Their objection is an explosion due to our practice of pressure and ordering from when they were little kids. Inevitably comes the day when they explode. We think that we, as parents, are right and they are wrong, and fail to remember how we hurt them through our bad behavior from when they were kids.

LEARN DIALOG AND OBEDIENCE FROM GOD

God delights when His weak creation engages in a dialogue with Him, as Abraham did before the burning of Sodom and Gomorra (Genesis 18), and as Moses talked to God as a Friend (Exodus 33:11). God asks us "let us reason together." (Isaiah 1:18) What is marvelous is that "the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name." (Exodus 33: 17)

OBEDIENCE IS A MEETING WITH OUR HUMBLE CHRIST

We mentioned that obedience is enjoyment in the sharing of Jesus Christ's gentleness and simplicity. He obeyed the Father, although His will is that of His Father. In His love He said, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." (Luke 22:42) The Son has an identical will with that of the Father, but He obeyed so that we may learn from His example. By His words He makes us capable of repeating His words with boasting, and we give up our will in order to fulfill the holy will that is announced to us through those around us.

A person who is stubborn does not enjoy the spirit of truth and uniqueness. There is an old Egyptian saying which states, "Two never change their mind: the dumb and the dead! The sober and wise man accepts other's opinions and enjoys obeying them as long as they are righteous."

But one can ask, "How do I know the voice of truth that we may obey it?" Or, "How can I know that the advice given to me is the voice of my Lord Jesus?"

A story was told about a man who was in one of the deserts in Northwest Africa. There, he encountered a dust storm. While walking through the storm, he found countless numbers of sheep. Suddenly, six shepherds appeared together resulting in the sheep to move to an area of water and relax. After a while, a shepherd left the other five, walked around, and started to sing. A small number of sheep left the others and approached him. With continuous singing, his sheep gradually were attracted to him and assembled around him, while the others stayed together.

It was also repeated with another shepherd. He started to sing, so his sheep also reunited. The same happened with the third shepherd, and so on. Then this person remembered the words of our Lord Jesus, "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they



know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." (John 10:4-5)

When you ask, "How do I know the voice of Jesus when someone talks to me?" the answer is if you were a friend with our Lord and have daily communion with Him, then you will definitely recognize His voice and obey His words through others.

It was also said that during World War I, some soldiers tried to steal a group of sheep while the shepherd was asleep on a hill beside Jerusalem on a hot day. He woke up suddenly and found the soldiers leading the sheep away from him. As he realized the difficulty of facing the soldiers, a thought came to him to get his sheep back. He moved to the other side and started to call his sheep with his voice, so they moved towards their shepherd to the point that the soldiers could not control them. The soldiers were confused not knowing what to do while the shepherd went to a safe place with his sheep.

RECOGNIZING THE VOICE OF YOUR MASTER

Once in a dog show tournament, one dog was lost and went down the stage. In confusion, it kept walking here and there. Many were whistling to him to come to them. But the dog did not give any attention to them because he was looking for his master. Finally, a boy whistled from far away and the dog ran toward him and threw himself on him. The dog recognized the voice of his master even among thousands of voices!

"I WILL NEVER GIVE UP MY BELOVED DOG"

Dr. Lee Roberson told a story. One day, he saw a group of people with a dog performing a trick. Dr. Roberson observed the dog and found the dog looking at a boy moving his lips. After the trick, the dog moved toward the boy and, out of happiness, wagged his tail. His eyes were focused solely on the boy, and then he approached the boy closely.

Dr. Roberson felt that the dog was telling the boy, "Didn't I make you happy, **didn't I completely obey you?**" In tender kindness, the boy petted the dog's head saying, "Good doggie."

Dr. Roberson went to them and asked the boy, "Can I purchase this special dog for 10 dollars?" This amount of money was a big value at that time. The boy replied, "Even if you paid 100 times this amount, I won't give up my beloved dog."

THE OBEDIENT SLAVE

It is said that an atheist man had a slave who loved God and never stopped believing in Jesus Christ. One day the master wanted to mock that slave. He called him in front of another slave. "Are you a preacher, Sam?" The slave replied, "I love my Master Jesus Christ, and would like all to enjoy his love. The master asked, "If you are a preacher, you need to know the Bible. Tell me the meaning of "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to be]



conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29). Simply the slave asked, “Where is this verse, master?” The master answered, “In the epistle of Paul to the Romans.” So the slave replied, simply, “Dear master, I will explain to you this phrase in a very simple way. Let us start with the Gospel of Matthew, and do everything God asked us to do in this Gospel, then start in Mark and do everything we were asked to do, then Luke and obey all His commandments, then you will find the meaning of this verse very easy and clear.”

OBEDIENCE TO THE VOICE OF THE KING OF THE KINGS

A missionary was having a walk in the restaurant of a hotel in India. He found for himself a seat between two men, one of them was a commander in the army and the other was a chief in the navy, along with their families. They were having a discussion together; one told the other, “I wonder why missionaries come to India? Why don't they stay in their countries?” The missionary interfered and asked, “If you were now ordered to leave immediately with your soldiers to a certain place to enter into a battle with your enemy, would you be late?” The soldier replied, “No, because I am committed to obey my boss for the country.” Then the missionary answered, “I am a Christian, and Jesus Christ is my King. I serve Him as I am citizen in the kingdom of God.

My King rose from the dead and gave us a holy responsibility, ‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19). For this reason we came here to India - to fulfill our God's orders and serve His kingdom.”

APPRECIATE OBEDIENCE

A farmer once saw a group of knights coming from afar. He was afraid that they would pass through his field and cause damages to his crops, so he asked a boy working with him to close the door. The boy rushed and closed the door. In seconds, the knights reached the door and asked the boy to open, so the boy replied, “I can't! My master ordered me to close the door.” The horseman said, “Do you not know me? I am the duke of Wellington, and I order you to open this door, so that my friends and I can pass.”

The boy took off his hat and greeted the duke in respect, but said, “I am sure that the duke of Wellington will not allow me to disobey my master's rules. I am committed to leave the door closed and to prevent anyone from entering unless my master says otherwise.”

The duke was happy from the boy's loyalty to his master. He himself took off his hat and greeted the obedient and loyal boy, saying, “I greet the man who does not fear refusing what is wrong.”

The duke offered the boy a gold pound and left with his friends without



entering the field! This is how obedience leads others to respect and appreciate the person who obeys his leaders in the Lord.

OBEDIENCE AND PURITY

Many years ago, a youth came to me seeming to be religious, quiet, and decent. Bitterly, he complained about adultery of the heart. He said, “I fast for long periods and cry during my prayers for the Lord to release me from the war of evil desire, but all is in vain. I always read the bible and refrain from reading any cheap attractive books. I have no bad friends and do not see any bad attractions. What else can I do?”

I asked him, “What is your relationship with your parents?” He said that he always complains and argues with them. I had put my finger on the problem; he disobeys his parents, so his body does not obey the soul. He who does not have a good relationship with his family cannot control his inner feelings. This is the holy law: “Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” (Eph. 6:2-3). Since the meeting with this youth, I concluded that he who complains from evil desires must review his dealings and relationship with his parents, brothers, relatives, colleagues, and employers. He who plants violence and disobedience will not reap anything but inner war and temptations.

REWARD FOR EVERY ACTION

I recall a true story which happened in a village called El-Nagaa near Esnah in Upper-Egypt. One day some farmers were on their way to Esnah. As they were walking, they saw a young man holding a stick and hitting his father, who was falling into a ditch.

The farmers were calling the boy and started to scold at him. But the father asked them not to scold the boy, but to leave him to do what he wants. The farmers were surprised, so the father told them, “Why are you surprised? When I was young, I hit my father with a stick in the same ditch!” The poison you give to others will definitely be your drink one day, even if after many years. Your disobedience to your parents and counselors will surely yield disobedience to you in due time.

COMMANDMENT OR PROMISE?

The first commandment in the Law is “listen,” as if the first command God asks us is obedience. But I wonder, is this a commandment that represents a duty that we are committed to do, or is it a promise which we ask God to grant us so that if we listen to Him, He also listens to us?

Obedience is a divine commandment. God is pleased to give us the ability to do it, so that He opens the door of mercy to give us what we ask. He bends his ears to listen to our heartbeats and responds to them. With a spirit full of love, Moses dealt with his disobedient nation through God's mercy (Exodus



Notes

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