

From The Pastor's Study

The Voice of Authority

Over the month of May my sermons have been about loving God. In case you didn't notice there is a thread that runs through each of those sermons. In some it may be obvious other times it is a bit more subtle and it is something I really struggled with early in my Christian walk. I still struggle with obedience but the struggle isn't as hard as it once was, in fact it is almost easy, sometimes it scares me a bit because it is too easy.

I wasn't an obedient child, according to my mother I even resisted coming into this world. If I was told to do something I would ignore it until I finally got into trouble. When I was about 13 I just didn't want to mow the yard one Saturday morning and I slammed the mower into a small China Berry tree. There was a Yellow Jacket nest in the tree, I got hit three times around my eye, it was all but swollen shut. I could tell dozens of cases like that, I didn't always suffer because of my actions, but often paid a price. Even when I joined the Navy I was resistant to being told what to do, you can imagine how far that got me.

As a preteen and young teen I was with my friends at church a couple times a week and I listened intently as our Sunday school teacher, the pastor, and adult advisors spoke about scripture and about Jesus. I was getting such mixed messages; one minute they are talking about how much Jesus loves us, what a merciful God He is, then God is sending His people off to wipe out an entire town because they disobeyed God. I was confused and when I tried to ask questions, for clarifications but the answers I received weren't answers, they were dodges. What they were teaching me was that I was to obey without question, that I was to accept as fact without doubt. As a 14 year old I soon discovered bigotry within the church and walked away from the church.

Obedience just turned into rules and laws to be observe without question or God had some kind of punishment. The Bible lost it's positivity, it became "that which must be obeyed" or else. I began studying the Bible and what I determined was that Jesus and God couldn't be the same person; God was judicial, passing out judgement to those who do not obey Him; Jesus was all about love and sacrifice, healing both body and heart. I couldn't recognize how obedience of hard rules and the benefits of obedience, other than not angering God. And that is because I hadn't been taught, no one considered my salvation important enough to hear my questions nor enough consideration to answer them.

I remember one of my last Sundays in that church the preacher spoke about the fact that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, He never changes. After worship I approached my Sunday school teacher and asked him if God never changes, what about Jonah and Nineveh. He asked me what I meant and I said that God had let Nineveh off the hook, He changed His mind. He told me God can change His mind anytime He desires and I replied that the preacher was very straight forward that God never changes, NEVER. His response, "It is a mystery that we are not to understand." And I asked him why God put it in the Bible if we weren't supposed to understand.

The really sad thing is that I understood what the preacher said, I just wanted to show my teacher how really fake he was. It wasn't that God didn't want us to understand, the reasoning behind it was really simple. Jonah knew the Pentateuch well and he should have remembered what God said to Moses, **Exodus 33:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ And he said, "*I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.*"

You see, God didn't change, and it was no great mystery; God always reserves the right to change His mind. Anyone who teaches or leads has to be ready to respond to hard questions and we need to be ready to say, "I hadn't thought about that, maybe we can research this together." It is so much better to tell someone I don't know than to display ignorance by answering with some made up junk.

So, as you can see, rebelling against authority has always been a game for me, so how did I move from rejecting authority to becoming obedient? Oh, I am still resistant and have a hard time being obedient but by looking back at the times I have been obedient and the good that comes when I did; on the other hand, I have seen what happens when I am not obedient and it makes it a lot easier to trust what God has planned for me. I still will nit sit here and tell you I am a completely obedient servant, I am still resistant, but I am much better than I was.

When the prior pastor departed suddenly just before Easter, I was ready to contact Presbytery and tell them I needed someone to come in and take over the church, that I wasn't ready for this. I spent at least an hour in the sanctuary talking to God, giving every excuse I could think of, every reason why it couldn't do it. In the end I felt God had rejected every reason I had put in front of Him. No, I never heard a word, God didn't speak to me directly but I could feel the weakness in my excuses as if He had rejected it. Finally I said, "Fine, but I am not doing this alone." And I

have never felt alone any day since, and I have discovered the thing I feared the most, that which I was certain would cause me to fail, never was an issue.

No, I am still no Mr. Perfect, always obeying without question but I have learned a lot and I know resisting God's plan is futile. Will you join me in doing our best to be obedient servants? Will you dedicate yourself to serve God by serving those you can?