Obedience (1)

Henning Panthel · Philippians 2:8 · November 30, 2025



Philippians 2:8

> 8 and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross.

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Obedience (1)

Obedience is no longer considered one of the top ten behaviors that people expect from themselves or others. But what does the Bible—the Word of God—say about obedience? Before diving into this topic, it's important to clarify what obedience actually means.

Obedience can be defined as "carrying out an instruction given by a higher authority." In the Bible, God is regarded as the highest authority. Therefore, every person is expected to be obedient to Him: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The Bible refers to those who do not acknowledge God as "sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2; 5:6; Colossians 3:6). Even believers were once characterized as "ununderstanding, disobedient, and misguided" before their conversion (Titus 3:3).

After their conversion, they become "obedient from the heart" (Romans 6:17). Now, God desires their lives to be marked by obedience to Him and His Word. They should be "doers of His Word," not out of compulsion, but out of love. If they do this, they will find happiness (James 1:22–25). But how can Christians achieve true obedience? We will explore this question in this article and two more to follow by addressing the following questions:

1. *Who is our great role model?*
2. *What does “obedience of faith” mean?*
3. *How can we personally be obedient?*

Who is our great example?

1. **What obedience meant for Christ**

"*… becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*" *(Philippians 2:8).*

Philippians 2:5–8 illustrates the Lord Jesus' humble attitude during His humiliation. Here we see the incarnate Son of God, who, as a servant, selflessly fulfilled the work His Father assigned Him. In this context, two significant aspects accompany His obedience: self-humiliation and consistency.

- ***Self-humiliation:***

The eternal Son of God could not complete His work without humbling Himself. He descended from heaven to a corrupted world, moving from glory to human misery. God Himself, in the person of the Son, became man, taking on the form of a servant (Luke 22:27). To serve, He could have chosen to appear as an angel (Psalm 104:4), but then He would not have been able to die for humanity. Thus, He became like us. Outwardly, He appeared indistinguishable from other humans. The crucial difference was that He did not commit sin, did not know sin, and had no sin within Him. He made Himself nothing in order to obediently fulfill His Father's commission.

- ***Consequence:***

It is incomprehensible that Jesus Christ became obedient "unto death." Death is the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23) and is the fate of every human being since all have sinned (Romans 3:23). However, the man Jesus Christ did not need to die because He was the only human who lived in complete accordance with God's standards. Yet, as an obedient servant, He voluntarily surrendered His life to death: "… so through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). The phrase in Philippians 2:8—"… even to death on a cross"—underscores the uniqueness of His obedience and the severe consequences it entailed. The act of crucifixion was the most agonizing method of execution; it was brutal and inhumane. Yet, the cross would become the place where God would judge Christ for all our sins—no sin could be overlooked. On the cross, He who knew no sin was made to bear our sins. This is why the cross represented unimaginable suffering for our Savior. The cross illustrates the consistency of His obedience: when He was arrested, Jesus could have easily walked away from His captors (John 18:6). He could have stopped the abuse at any moment or come down from the cross. Yet, He went there obediently and remained there, even in the face of insufferable pain (Psalm 129:3) and the mockery of men (Psalm 69:21). He bore the consequences of His obedience, even unto death on the cross. Let us worship Him for this.

Obedience often requires a willingness to take the lowest place and to consistently "see something through." Both are challenging for us. However, if we take Jesus as our example, it can help us be more obedient.

Why Christ Had to Learn Obedience

"*During the days of His flesh, … although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered*" *(Hebrews 5:7-8).*

As we reflect on who Jesus is, we are continually amazed by the unparalleled obedience of our Lord. The phrase "days of His flesh" refers to the time He lived on earth as a human being. However, it is important to remember that He is always God—before, during, and after His earthly life. He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and thus, there is no higher authority for Him. As the eternal God, He is not subject to anyone's obedience; rather, He has always commanded: "For by Him all

things were created, that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and all things exist through Him" (Colossians 1:16-17). Only as a human on earth did He need to be obedient, and that is when He learned obedience.

The Gospels present various instances in which He submitted to His Father's will, often resulting in suffering. As a human, He learned what obedience meant "in His suffering." Hebrews 5 highlights a pivotal moment in this learning process. This passage takes us to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus, in agonizing struggle, brings His distress over the impending atoning suffering of the cross to God in prayer. Nowhere else is it clearer that He learned obedience through suffering. Before Him lay the "hour"—the time on the cross when He would drink the "cup" of God's wrath. He would stand before the holy and righteous God, bearing the weight of countless sins, and face judgment. He would be made sin by God, and during the three terrible hours of darkness, God would forsake Him. In the place of others, He would die the atoning death, and all of this weighed heavily on Him. Because of His perfect holiness, He was compelled to say to His Father, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You; take this cup away from Me!" (Mark 14:36). Yet, in that same breath, He obediently added, "Not what I want, but what You want!" (Mark 14:36). Shortly after, we witness the practical demonstration of His obedience: "Get up, let us go; see, the one who betrays Me is at hand" (Mark 14:42).

The greatness of our Lord Jesus is evident; He had to learn obedience, not because He was disobedient, but precisely because He is the Son. In contrast, we humans must learn obedience because we are naturally disobedient and possess an evil will.

Conclusion

Is Jesus Christ an unattainable role model, even in terms of obedience? Yes, we can say that. Nevertheless, He left us His example to follow in His "footsteps" (1 Peter 2:21). Even small feet can follow in big footsteps, and we aspire to do just that.

In the next issue, we will explore a special form of obedience: the "obedience of faith" mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans.

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