Obedience in Practice (3)

Henning Panthel · 2 Corinthians 2:9 · December 2, 2025



2 Corinthians 2:9

> 9 For to this end also I have written, that I might know, by putting you to the test, if as to everything you are obedient.

New Darby Version © 2016 Mark Vedder · GBV Online

In the first two articles of our series on obedience, we examined the following questions:

- Who is our great role model?

- What does the "obedience of faith" mean?

We learned about the fundamental meaning of obedience and recognized the Lord Jesus as our perfect role model. We explored what the "obedience of faith" mentioned in Romans 1 and Romans 16 entails: it involves faith and obedience to the gospel and the truths concerning Christ and His church.

In this article, we will focus on the question, "How can we be personally obedient?" We can gain valuable insights from the example of the prophet Jonah.

Obedience Means Making the Right Decisions

"And the word of the LORD came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.' But Jonah set out to flee from the LORD to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid his fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, away from the LORD." (Jonah 1:1-3)

This is not the first time God has given Jonah a mission. As God's messenger, he had previously told the people of Israel that King Jeroboam would restore the land's borders, which he did (2 Kings 14:25). This earlier mission was likely easy for Jonah, as it aligned with his own beliefs. However, now God has assigned him a task that poses a challenge. As a proud Israelite, he is to deliver a message to the godless pagans in Nineveh. Jonah agrees that he should announce judgment, but he objects to including God's mercy in that warning. He faces a decision: either obey God's will and set aside his personal feelings or ignore God and follow his own inclinations. Jonah ultimately makes a poor choice—he consciously disobeys God by running away.

We are given the ability to make conscious decisions, and when it comes to God's will, we must take a clear stand; we cannot simply abstain from making a choice. Israel had to decide between dead idols and the living God; anything else would mean "limping between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21). Since God demands obedience, choosing against His will is not a valid option; it constitutes conscious disobedience. Through Jonah, we learn that God disciplines us for our choices. In Jonah's case, this discipline comes in the form of a fierce storm and three days in the depths of the sea inside a fish.

Obedience Must Come from the Heart

"And the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah rose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." (Jonah 3:1-3)

"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry." (Jonah 4:1)

The time spent in the depths of the sea was a difficult lesson for Jonah. He learned part of his lesson, and God granted him a second chance. How long-suffering God is—first with Jonah, and today with us. Jonah seizes this second opportunity, obediently goes to Nineveh, and proclaims God's message. However, when he sees the people repent and that God shows mercy, it becomes evident that despite his obedience, he still struggles internally. God's gracious treatment of these pagans (who, in Jonah's view, deserve judgment) angers him. He fails to understand God. Worse yet, he disagrees with Him. While Jonah has learned to obey God as the "higher authority," it appears he is doing so out of obligation rather than from his heart.

In a military context, a superior expects orders to be followed, regardless of whether the person receiving them understands or agrees with them. However, God is not a "military superior." He is our Father. When a father gives his son a task, he wants his son to respond with a "yes" from his heart and with conviction. It brings the father joy when his child obeys out of love and trust, because he has good intentions for his children.

When the Lord Jesus expresses to His Father, "Yes, Father, for this was well-pleasing in your sight" (Matthew 11:26), we see the connection between trust and obedience. Our heavenly Father desires this attitude from us as well. The Bible reveals God's will while also providing insight into His heart. Through His Word, we learn about His will in conjunction with His motives, and He wants us to embrace both. This understanding will lead to our obedience coming from the heart. Epaphras, a co-worker of Paul, prays that the Colossians will be "perfect and fully convinced in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12). However, we must also recognize that a lack of understanding is not a "free pass" for disobedience. If we do not comprehend God's will, we should still

seek to follow it and ask our Father for insight through prayer.

If Jonah had truly understood God's will, he would have recognized that it was good and right. Had his obedience stemmed from his heart, the book of Jonah could have concluded after the third chapter. However, because his obedience was not heartfelt and lacked an understanding of mercy, God had to teach him a lesson in chapter 4.

Self-centeredness is incompatible with true obedience.

In Jonah 4:9-11, God asks Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah responds, "I am angry enough to die!" The Lord then says to him, "You have pity on the plant, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came up in a night and perished in a night. Should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

Egotism involves the selfish desire to place oneself at the center of attention. When our "old nature" surfaces, we often recognize egocentric traits within ourselves. These traits can vary in intensity, leading us to believe that everything must revolve around us and that others should see things solely from our perspective. This mindset can extend to our expectations of God, as it did with Jonah. Despite his outward obedience, Jonah became disgruntled. His prayer in Jonah 4:2-3 is essentially a long accusation, revealing his belief that he would appear ridiculous or unpopular if God extended mercy to the enemies of His people. In this prayer, Jonah references himself nine times (using "I," "my," "me," "mine"). His self-centeredness escalates to the point where he implores God, "Take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

To be obedient to God, we cannot dictate to Him what His will should be; our own interests must be set aside. Jonah had not yet grasped this concept, so God continued to teach him lovingly. To alleviate Jonah's discontent, He caused a miraculous plant to grow overnight to provide him with shade. God wanted to convey to Jonah, "You rejoice in my kindness, but you do not rejoice in my kindness toward the people of

Nineveh!" Consequently, God removed the miraculous plant just as quickly as it had appeared. Jonah mourned for the withered plant, but he should have had compassion for the Ninevites who were under God's judgment.

At the conclusion of the book, Jonah clearly understood God's lessons, as we do not see a response from him afterward. He had finally accepted God's mercy.

Conclusion from this series:

- God is the "highest authority" in our lives, and we seek to be obedient to Him. We can look to our Lord as a shining example, who learned obedience through suffering—an obedience that ultimately led to His death on the cross.

- Through faith in the gospel, one becomes a child of God. In fellowship with other believers, our personal obedience to the truths about Christ and His church becomes a communal task.

- We do not want to run away from God when He calls us to obedience. Instead, we should strive to be obedient at all times, seeking to understand His will as fully as possible so that our obedience comes from the heart. In this endeavor, we must remember that the focus should not be on ourselves, but on Him.

Source https://thebiblestudy.site/article/obedience-in-practice-3/