

## Learning Obedience

Children who struggle with (or never hear) “Because I said so!” as an answer to “Why do I have to do this?” will likely never learn *submission* and *obedience* as adults in several areas, not the least of which is in *spiritual* realm. But, “Because I said so” is exactly what must be understood, depending of course, upon exactly who the “I” is. Note Colossians 3:20, “*Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord*” together with Ephesians 6:1, “*Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*” The obvious conclusion is that children are to obey their parents as long as the parents’ requirements don’t violate what is “*right,*” or “*in the Lord*” (i.e. unless and until *obedience to parents* would be *disobedience to the Lord*). When parents are doing what they should to “*bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord*” as Ephesians 6:4 demands, they (the parents) become *agents of God* doing His will. If the child is old enough to understand these things, by all means explain it to him or her. Otherwise, “Because I said so” is sufficient... and ultimately, not only proper but helpful.

What these things are emphasizing is that *submission/obedience* is a “learned” behavior that must be first taught and instilled by the parents. Then as the child grows and matures, it can be further developed personally in *spiritual* and other more adult applications. Initially especially, it’s hard work demanding persistence, consistency and love. There is no pill that will produce it. But early dedication in these regards lays a foundation from which adult *submission* and *obedience* to higher authorities than parents are more easily developed and accepted.

So, given these things, what are the steps by which *submission/obedience* are learned (first as *children*, then further developed as *adults*)? It seems these basics are essential to the process of *learning obedience*:

**Step 1- Learn the law.** *Knowing right* necessarily precedes *doing right*. We can’t *obey* what we don’t *know*. Therefore, knowing “*the right thing*” simply must come first, cf. James 4:17; Matthew 22:29. Though *diligence* is definitely required (2Timothy 2:15), this first step is the easiest. To illustrate the point: Which is easier to teach a child *what* is right, or to get them *to do* it? So...

**Step 2- Develop a desire to obey.** Just *knowing right* doesn’t necessarily mean you *want to* or are *willing to do right*. The desire to submit/obey comes from understanding and *believing in* the value of the Scriptures/law, and therefore *doing right*, John 2:22. In children, the perception of this *value* comes from *positive reinforcement* (reward) and *negative consequences* (punishment). For adults and in the spiritual realm, value is perceived in much the same way- though the rewards/punishments are *future* and *eternal* rather than *immediate* and *temporal*, 2Corinthians 5:19-10.

**Step 3- Be willing to submit.** Just because one *knows* what is right, and even *wants* to do what is right, does not mean that he is *willing* to give up his own way and *submit* himself to obedience. Therefore, to obey, we must be willing to set aside *self* and *selfish* desires. Then, *knowing* and *understanding* what is right can unite with the *desire to please Him* to produce *obedience*, Colossians 1:9-10. Otherwise, desiring or insisting on “my way” puts us at odds with God, and obviously precludes

obedience, cf. Matthew 16:23-24. *“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God,”* James 4:6-7.

**Step 4- Do the *right thing* on purpose.** We can't *accidentally* or *unintentionally* “obey.” Accidental compliance isn't really *obedience*, since true obedience includes *submission* (being willing to *order* or *arrange oneself* under the control/guidance of another). Similarly, compliance that is *forced*- where the *right thing* is done but not for the *right reason*, isn't “obedience” either. To truly *obey*, we must do the *right thing* for the *right reason*, cf. Ephesians 5:10 and John 13:17.

**Step 5- Do the *right thing* even when it has negative *temporal* consequences.** This is the coup de grace of *selfish disobedience*. If we: *know the law*; *desire to obey* it; are *willing to submit* to it; and *purposely* do the *right thing even when it has negative temporal consequences*, we have “learned obedience.” Note Hebrews 5:8-9 where of Jesus it reads, *“although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect; He became to all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.”* Jesus: *knew what was right*; *desired to obey*; was *willing to submit* Himself to God's will; and *purposely did the right thing* despite *suffering negative temporal consequences*. That is not only “how” true obedience is learned, that is “when” true obedience is learned.

Do you “*have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus*” to “*empty*” and “*humble*” yourself to become “*obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,*”

Philippians 2:5-8? Friend, that's exactly what “learning obedience” requires! (Philip C.

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