

“BLESSED ARE THE OBEDIENT”  
Deuteronomy 28:1-14

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INTRODUCTION:

1) Obedience in secular life: Some have said: One of the life-long lessons we all need to learn is to “obey.” We were taught to “obey” Mommy when we were still babies. When we began to go to school, we were told again to obey the teachers. When we got a degree from college and found our first job, we all knew that we needed to obey our bosses. Later in life, when we got married, we were told by those “old hands” to obey our wives to keep the marriage going and to have peace at home. At the last stage of our life when we get older, we have to obey our children. This doesn't include: obey the police or the traffic signs, especially in school zones; obey the IRS and pay your taxes. And of course, we need to obey all the doctors we visit and pay them. Did I miss something or someone else we are supposed to obey?

Although “to obey” is a fact of life, none of us is perfect in this. We learn from failures, but still can't do all the obeying. That is because we were not born with that “obedient” nature. Just look at our kids and how they respond to our orders; then you know there isn't much in them that will make them obey our words.

2) Obedience in Christian life: Obedience isn't just about our everyday life, it is also about our spiritual life. The text today is only one of the short but direct instructions from our Lord God to obey him. Just in the OT, the word “obey” is listed over 600 times. God is very serious about our attitude toward obedience in our text today, and so is Jesus. This is true: from

early history God demanded that we obey his command and he gave the consequences if we don't. Looking at our Christian life experience, we all know that obeying God and his word is the best way to live our life, but how often do we really do that? It seems that neither the Bible nor practical life experience convinces us that the best way to live is by obeying God's word, commands, leadership, directives, etc. I used to hear an old Norwegian missionary pastor said this in Mandarin: “活到老，学到老，一辈子，没学好。” “We live and we learn, but we never learn enough” to obey, either people or God. Why is that?

OBEDIENCE IS A TOUGH JOB: Psychologists and behavioral scientists have written extensively on why human beings are not good at obedience, in fact we are worse than animals, at this. The concluding factor is that we were not born to obey or follow but to be independent in choosing what we see and feel as right and good. While there are good and positive elements in that independent nature, it is oftentimes a huge problem when it comes to obeying or following instructions and commands, whether from people or God. Both from my study of the Bible and personal life experience, I would like to draw your attention to two following reasons why it's so hard to obey:

1) It's an expression of pride: Pride is in the nature of all human beings, be it young and not so young. The first word of all babies who are in early stages of learning to speak is “No!”—besides the natural uttering of “Mama” or “Papa” we hear every day. You may well say that is from the Mama who always tells her babies: No, No! Well, Mom didn't tell babies

just that simple word but many other words, so why that is the first word they pick up and repeat with ease? It isn't just a simple word; it represents their sense of pride: "I don't have to listen or obey you." We want to be independent from all people, even our parents, teachers, bosses or even God, so we want to say "no." Respect of authority isn't part of our nature since day one of human history, starting with Eve who wanted to choose her own fruit to eat instead of listening to and obeying God's command.

2) It's also about lack of trust: Lacking trust for others leads us not to believe in others, much less follow or obey them. We see this first in young people at home, where many conflicts happen because of disobedience: Kids always think they know better in their choices, rather than believing in and following their parents. We don't trust that commands from parents or God or teaching from authority figures are better, good for us, or helpful in having a smoother ride in life. We even doubt if commands from both parents and God are truly for our own good. We don't trust that they know better or that they act to protect us from harm or suffering unnecessary trouble. We don't even trust that God, parents and other authorities who give commands, set rules and instructions have the best of our interest in their minds.

Many of the troubles in family and our society start from lack of trust in authority. Troubles in everyday life, juvenile delinquency, marriage, crime and social disorder, most of them come from lack of trust. In fact, rules, instructions, orders, commands, etc., are there for our own good. So, the choice is easy: We better obey and follow.

WHY DO WE NEED TO OBEY GOD? Many books have been written to teach us to obey God that present lists of reasons to encourage us to do that. Among all these, let me point out a few obvious ones so we have clear reason to listen and obey him:

1) We obey because God is much wiser: No one will dispute that God has a lot more wisdom than we have; he can see much farther than we can see; his plan is much better than our plans, and his way of accomplishing goals is superior to our way.

a) Exodus 3:7-8, “The Lord said: I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave masters, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” If you are now in a situation like that of the Israelites in Egypt, you can rest knowing that the Lord God sees your suffering, and he has a plan to deliver you to a better place. God sees much farther and his plan is much better for you.

b) Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” If you think you are better in thoughts and plans and ways of life than God is, you need to think it over again. In their stress as captives in a foreign country, the Israelites got stuck in a situation where there wasn't a way out. But God had a better plan to bring them back to their beloved old country. Do you believe God can see better, can plan better to elevate your situation? Can

you listen and obey him?

c) Romans 11:33-35, “Oh, the depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor! Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?’” After giving a full explanation of the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus, Paul broke down to praise God and his wisdom in poetic form to show us that we certainly can trust God and his wisdom in all aspects of our life.

If we can believe in the complete wisdom of God, we certainly can trust and obey his commands in our life.

2) We obey because God is all powerful: The Bible records countless examples of God's power and dealing with our needs. The phrase “power of God” is used in the Bible more than 60 times.

a) God's promise of his giving a son, even when Sarah was in her old age, in Genesis 18:12-14, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

b) God's foretelling of his plan for the return of Israelites from captivity in Jeremiah 32:27: “I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”

c) In the announcement of the coming of Jesus to Mary, the angel told Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35)

d) Even in the most stressful situation as in the prison, Paul proclaimed his faith in the power of God when he exclaimed, “I can do all things through him who gives me

strength.” (Phil 4:13)

If you truly believe that God's power is way beyond our imagination, that in him nothing is out of his control, that there isn't any such thing as hopeless or helpless, then there is no reason we may doubt his power. Therefore, there is no reason we can't believe in him and follow his lead.

3) We obey because God truly loves us: Many of us tend to believe that only in the NT God shows his love, as in John 3:16. The truth is there are dozens of places in the OT where God told his people of his love, many in Deuteronomy, the prophets and in the famous Book of Psalms. If we truly believe that God is much wiser than we are, has a lot more power than ours, and truly loves us, then there isn't any reason we need to doubt God, and should obey his word.

OBEY OR DISOBEY, THE CHOICE IS CLEAR: (Deut 28)

1) The blessings of obeying God: In Deuteronomy 28, God spells out clearly the choice and consequences of obeying and disobeying. In 28:1-14, God promised his many blessings, 14 to count, from family, children, possessions, victories over enemies, everyday business dealings, their eternal relationship with God and his blessing of riches and peace among nations. In the OT time, God often promised material and tangible blessings. Then in the NT, Jesus showed us a different kind of blessing if we obey his commands, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14:21, 23) I don't think

anyone needs any further explanation about this promise of blessing to those who obey God.

2) The troubles in disobeying God: The rest of Deut 28:15-68 lists multiple troubles for those who chose not to obey God. Spend two to three minutes to read this list of troubles, cursing, suffering, poverty, defeat, disasters, enemies and many others that God promised the disobedient will face. Don't be fooled by the rebellious that they will enjoy prosperity, peace, fame and power; they won't. God has his time and ways to deal with the rebellious. It is a frightening description of pain and suffering just to read this part of the Bible.

### LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

1) We do this every day: If you are using a computer, an iPhone or any other electronic gadget that requires you to use apps or programs that will enhance the efficiency or expand the functions of your device, you need to download the app or program from the manufacturer. But before you can do that, you need to make a decision if you want to comply with the agreement set by the app or program company. On the small screen of the contract, which none of us actually reads, there are two choices: "I Decline" or "I Agree." You have to agree to use that app or program. We do this so many times, it has become a habit, so we just click "I agree" and continue.

The Bible in fact is also a contract between God and us. The word "testament" means a contract. Since we have agreed to accept the salvation in Jesus Christ, and promised to be his disciples, why is it so difficult to say "I agree" again when it comes to obeying his commands? If we can trust the

app or program companies that their app and programs are good for our computer and phone, why can't we trust God that his app and program are much more beneficial to our Christian life? Be smart and say "I agree" every time.

2) Consider the consequences: I am talking about the sure consequences of rejecting the contract of God in your life, both spiritual and physical. In the use of a computer or a phone, you may not be able to use it to its fullest extent if you reject improving and expanding the function of the gadget, but that isn't a big deal. But in our real life, rejecting God's call to agree with him and follow his guidelines will have miserable, terrible consequences we can't afford to go through, missing all the blessings of obedience. I am talking about the love, the wisdom, the power, protection, guidance, provision and all other fringe benefits that come with obeying his commands prescribed in the Bible passage we have just studied. Can anyone afford to live his life without all these?

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