

The Understanding/Obedience Question

(10/15/03)

Greetings to the Church That Used to Meet at Betsy's House,

I have a little housekeeping to take care of before I share with you some things that the Lord has brought to my attention this week.

Last Friday, at our weekly evening meeting, I was challenged on a statement I made. The statement was, as best I can recall, "we can only know the truth of God's Word when we obey it and experience it". The operative word here is "only". My statement was absolutely wrong and I am truly grateful to the brothers who called me to task on it.

I cannot begin to express to you how gratifying it is to have that kind of response from those who are involved in this ministry. It is a demonstration of the degree of the value they place on the careful consideration of what they will accept as true. They remind me of those "noble Bereans" in Acts. They are a teachers delight, and it is my great pleasure to give them a A+++ for their responses. Thank you for your thoughts

This coming week I will share with you some things relevant to that very issue.

We will, also, be studying II Corinthians 9:10-15. Come prepared to think, learn, be disturbed and grow.

Now to the business at hand.

I had a interesting conversation with a brother recently that got me thinking---"oh, oh", I can hear many of you say, "here we go again".

The conversation had to do with the idea of "understanding" as it related to obedience. On the one hand we are to obey God, plain, pure and simple. On the other hand, God wants us to understand the reason for that obedience.

Several question can come to mind with those considerations. Questions like, do I only obey when I understand?, what if there are situations that are beyond my finite abilities to understand? Or how about situations in which I lack the needed information that would provide me with the required details to fully understand?

So then we might summarize it with what do I do when I am faced with situations that are beyond my immediate knowledge and/or abilities?

God, the Bible teaches us, wants us to understand those commands, instructions and encouragement that are clearly delineated in His Word. It is really a prima facia case that is evidenced by the very fact that He has provided us with the canon of Scripture we know as the Bible.

There are, in Scripture, some cases that are clearly delineated and applicable. The 10 Commandments are certainly clear enough with regard of what not to do. However, something's, are not quite that clear. Things like "Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10) are not so clearcut.

Just what does that "honoring" look like in our earthly existence? Should I do that when by doing so I inflate a already bloated ego? How does that square with admonishing? And the list could go on and on.

It soon becomes clear that understanding is required and is the basis for wisdom. Wisdom is understanding put into action. Understanding, like all things, does not exist in a vacuum but is part and parcel of the whole.

Whenever we try to isolate one thing we must always remember that it is but a part of something.

I'm reminded of something that we did during a assignment in my high school biology class many years ago. Our task was to dissect a frog and then list all the parts, making observations as we went. We would note the external and internal organs etc. At the end we would then be evaluated on what we had observed and how carefully we had examined the frog. Some had lots and lots of detailed notes on what made up the frog while others were much more cursory in their examination.

In all the notes, however, not one person noted the most important aspect of that frog. That frog was "dead as a doornail". And so it is when we take the life out of the Word of God. God, via the Holy Spirit, works in and through us in each individual situation. He works within our personality and abilities to bring about the manifestation of His Truth in and through us.

Our job, then, is to provide the conditions which will facilitate that outcome. We must present ourselves to Him and "study" His Word so that the material for that outworking is there for the Holy Spirit to use.

Let me conclude with a quote from I Corinthians 2:6-16---Paul teaches us the following---

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or the of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: 'no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him: In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

See you this coming Friday at 7PM if you plan to eat and 7:30 if you don't.

In His Love,

Tomme