

## Receiving Obedience

Happy Sabbath to all.

Today I would like to speak a bit about obedience. This is a central theme for Christianity, and – as with every other doctrine – Satan has attempted to draw a veil of confusion over the truth, so that mankind will be kept from a saving knowledge of the character of the Father and Son.

What does the Bible tell us about obedience? Of the many verses, here is a good cross-section of what it presents:

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, for all the earth is mine.” (Exo 19:5)

“Ye shall walk after Yahweh your Elohim, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and ye shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him.” (Deu 13:4)

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” (Acts 5:29)

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through Yahweh to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2Cor 10:4, 5)

“Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.” (Phi 1:21)

“And being made perfect, [Yahshua] became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” (Heb 5:9)

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of Yah; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Pet 4:17)

You may note that I have included more verses from the New Testament in this list than the Old, and may suspect that by this I am trying to make a point – that the requirement of Yah’s people to obey did not pass away with the cross. Yet, while there is such a point to be made, the Scriptures themselves seem to make it, for the word “obey” occurs as often in the New Testament as in the Old Testament, and the word “obedience” occurs only in the New.

We, as Adventists, have learned that “force,” the compulsion of the actions of others, is a desperation tactic in spiritual matters. It is employed by those who have carnal might, when agreement, then persuasion, and then even threats, all fail. Since force is generally employed only after coercion and threats, it is a sound statement to declare that force will only be found in religions that have abandoned the character of the Savior, and become corrupted and false in their essential nature.

This is different, although some are not able to make the distinction, from both “discipline,” and “judgment.”

Discipline, like force, does seek to affect the behavior, and even the beliefs, of individuals. However, the context and methods are very different. Again, we are speaking here of a religious setting, and we read, “My son, despise not the chastening of Yahweh, neither be weary of His correction.” (Pro 3:11) And again, “All scripture is given by inspiration of Yahweh, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of Yah may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim 3:16, 17)

The context and methods are different, in that discipline seeks to guide an individual into perfection in the fulfilling of commitments that he or she has already made. Force, as employed by a religious body, seeks to compel an individual in ways that he or she does not, by any commitment, desire to go. Discipline is something that we choose to receive, if we wish to stay in the Way. Force seeks to drive us from the way in which we are convicted we should walk.

The goal of discipline, as that verse from 2 Timothy tells us, is perfection, the suitability to perform all good works in Christ. The goal of force is to cause one individual to bow to the will of another, and is not concerned at all with perfection, the development of character, or good works.

Judgment, likewise, has some similarities with force, but here again the intentions and outcomes are different. When Yahweh releases judgment on an individual, or a location, it seems on the surface very much like force. Mountains tremble, fire and brimstone rain down from the sky, plagues spread, and people die. One might say that Yahweh used “force” to compel the Pharaoh to release the Israelites, for example... and some might attempt to justify this by saying, “Yahweh has the right to use force if He wishes to do so.”

But whereas that statement is accurate so far as His authority goes, the truth is more consistent than this. Judgment is employed by a judge – in spiritual matters, this is One holding absolute authority to decide cases – where there is a conflict between two parties. Even in secular courts, for example, an individual is not merely brought before a court because he or she broke the law. The language of the legal system is specific, and patterned after Yah’s system (even though it has been perverted and changed with the passage of time). As the charges are read to the individual, he or she is informed that it is the state, or country, or (in a civil lawsuit) another individual, “versus” them.

A lawsuit occurs when there is an imbalance, or a perceived imbalance, between two parties with regard to a matter of law. The judge, after hearing the evidence, then decides in favor of one party, and against the other. If the state or country wins in a criminal matter, then the convicted one must suffer a penalty, and this is the “judgment” of the court. In a civil proceeding, the court may direct the guilty party to compensate the innocent one – within the limits of that court’s authority. This not considered as “force” if the laws of Yah and men are faithfully employed as the standard for judgment, even if the condemned individual is imprisoned or even executed. The judgment is passed in order to vindicate and preserve the safety of the innocent party, including the society as a whole.

Now, what does this have to do with Pharaoh, and ultimately with obedience? The Scriptures tell us, if we read carefully, that even for all the violence of the ten plagues, this was not merely a show of “force” on Yah’s part to compel Pharaoh to release the Israelites. It was actually a “judgment,” in a fairly legal sense, on behalf of Israel, and against their captors. As we read, “And [the Egyptians] made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service,

wherein they made them serve, was with rigour. And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto Elohim by reason of the bondage. And Elohim heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them. And Yahweh said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee [Moses] unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.'" (Exo 1:14, 2:23-25, 3:7-10)

The Bible takes great care in establishing the conditions of the Israelites in Egypt, and explaining, repeatedly, that they were crying out to Yah for mercy. This was not merely to justify the actions of Moses in relieving a country of its workforce, but – as with all of the Bible – this was written to tell us something about our Heavenly Father. He is consistent. He is faithful and true. He acts always with supreme integrity, justice, and even-handedness.

Yahweh employed extreme measures against the land of Egypt, not merely to show His "force," because... if you think about it, He did not win many hearts from among the Egyptians. Even those who followed Moses out of the land were a mixed multitude who were among the most rebellious of the travelers. Yah well knows that a display of power does not truly win any loyalty, and what He did here was not so much about the Egyptians as it was about the Israelites.

Yah had a covenant with His people, that they would serve Him, that they would provide Him with offerings (a practice begun in the days of Adam, and continuing down through all his faithful sons – Gen 4:4) and keep His Sabbaths (Exo 5:5). And yet the Egyptians, by their lordship over the Israelites, were preventing them from fulfilling this covenant. Their prayers therefore constituted a "legal complaint" before the courts of Heaven, and Yah – having decided in their favor – moved to set the situation right.

I am taking the time to set this up, because it is important, and an often-misunderstood aspect of Yahweh's dealings with mankind. He disciplines His people, and He passes judgment on His (and their) enemies, but in neither of these things does He employ the kind of "force" that leads to the violation of righteous consciences, or that compels men contrary than they would go if they knew His purpose. Even in the very final judgment, when all sin and sinners are destroyed, this is preceded by an acknowledgment, even by Satan himself, that all of Yah's workings are just. This is how freedom, free will, is preserved even in the presence of Yahweh's absolute power.

Now, knowing these things, what ought the nature of our obedience be?

The real topic before us is that of obedience. I might ask, then, have you received obedience?

I do not ask if you have begun to obey the Word of Yah, or the Gospel of Christ. I do not ask if you already obey, or if you plan to continue to obey. These are verbs, words that signify action. But I ask

instead if you have received “obedience,” a noun, a thing that Yah has created in His preservation of human freedom.

It is a state that exists because Yah has created it, and “obedience” is a gift from Yah, whether or not anyone receives it, and whether or not anyone obeys.

Obedience is not something we do, just as we cannot, of our own selves, be righteous. Obedience is, like the Sabbath, something into which we are invited to enter. There is no force involved.

In some religions, it is taught that, no matter what the condition of our character, Yah will take us to Heaven and prevent us from doing evil. He will change us in such a way that, even though our inclinations of personality would continue to be evil, we find that we no longer care to perform those inclinations. In fact, it is the very essence of Satan’s accusation against Yahweh: that His Law is arbitrary and unfair, and if any creature keeps it, it is because he is compelled to do so. Look how easily, after all, he has been able to pervert all of mankind. Isn’t this evidence of how unreasonable the divine law is? Those who believe that Yahweh uses force, even subtle force, to compel men to be good contrary to their characters accept this argument as valid, and they do not speak rightly of our Father in Heaven.

We, who know the difference between force, discipline and judgment, see obedience quite differently.

It IS possible to keep Yah’s law. If it were not possible, we could not have been commanded to keep it. And if we who are converted to the truth, because of our sinful pasts, and our inclinations in the flesh, if we are in ignorance of how the law is to be applied perfectly to our lives, well then, let us accept discipline, and let us stand in Yah’s light, so that we will receive His judgment in the “decision” sense, and avoid His judgment in the “penalty” sense.

The Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, point out the importance of obedience to Yah. It is not that obedience makes us righteous. Those who believe so do not understand the difference between discipline and force. If we can “make” ourselves obey, they will reason, through a “force of will,” then Yahweh will be pleased with us. Again, force is a characteristic of false religions, and therefore righteousness based on works must also be found among their doctrines. They are connected.

But it is not sufficient to merely understand the “doctrines” here. The distinction between force, discipline and judgment is important, but more important is what they tell us about our Father, and how we therefore view obedience to His law.

If we see obedience as something we must make ourselves do, then we are seeing Yahweh as a god of force, who is pleased with human effort, and respects what little (if any) progress we can make through our personal power. This was the religion of Cain, and he was marked as a rebel because of his unbelief. It is the religion of the papacy, which expects failure, and therefore implements the Catholic Confessional, and a “punishment” of repeated prayers to train us to “be good.” It is the religion of the Sunday-keeping churches generally, who have followed in the papal traditions. Even though they have cast off many of the rote formalities of Catholicism, they must still “obey” the Gospel, as measured by various works, in order to be good Christians. This puts the “cart before the horse.”

And of all people, even those who believe in the once-saved-always-saved version of the Gospel, who believe that once you are converted, your actions do not matter... they also have a religion of force. In

their case, the force is simply transferred to Yahweh Himself. It is His responsibility to make us good, not our own efforts, but certainly not by entering into His character and resting in His righteousness.

But for us, we believe in righteousness by faith. We believe that we do not make ourselves good through force of will, and Yahweh does not make us good by an arbitrary employment of the force of His divine power. What allows us to be considered justified is Yah's own righteousness, willingly accepted as a part of our own character, and refined and perfected through the covenant we have with our Father. He will be our Almighty One, our Guide, our Discipliner, our Teacher, and we will be His people. We will enter into His rest, and with it, His love, His joy, and His perfect obedience. We will be One with Him, and with our Brethren. This is the nature of the covenant.

So again, obedience is a state that exists, because Yah declares it as a part of His covenant with us, just as the character of Christ is a part of our covenant of Him. It is not something we do; it is something we are, something we become in Him. It is something into which we are designed to fit. Let us receive it as such, just as we receive the Sabbath. In fact, this is how we say it. On Friday evenings, we "receive" the Sabbath, and we do so with prayers and the giving of thanks. In just such a manner, we ought to "receive" obedience and every other blessing and promise that our Father has given us.

Consider...Why do we say we receive the Sabbath? Why is it that Yahweh said the Sabbath was a "sign," a seal between Him and His people? (Exo 31:13, Ezek 20:20) It is because the Sabbath, more clearly, more obviously, than any other commandment of the ten, is a "gift." It is a gift designed to teach us peace, to teach us contentment, and to teach us obedience, that we should enter into it.

Then, brethren, when we are faced with temptations, let us not consider the effort to turn aside. Let us not consider the strength of Satan's enticements, or even the "strength" of our own faith. That is all irrelevant. Let us not, as the false religions do, consider punishment or reward, but rather let us see our Father as He is. Let us enter into the obedience of Yahweh, just as we have entered into His Sabbath, and in so doing, let us always and forever overcome. This is what it means to obey the Gospel of Yahshua, for it IS possible to truly obey, and by His divine character, received within us, to overcome even as He overcame.