

## The Opposite of Disobedience

by Coty Pinckney 7/3/08

What is the opposite of disobedience?

The obvious answer is "obedience." But that is not the biblical answer. And understanding why this logical answer is not biblical is key to living the Christian life.

Consider Psalm 1, which begins by describing the righteous man in negative terms:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

The righteous man does not act like or listen to the advice of those opposed to God, nor does he join them in mocking God. That is, he does not disobey God.

The psalmist then contrasts that negative description of the righteous man with a positive description. If the opposite of disobedience were obedience, we might expect a direct contrast with "does not walk in the counsel of the wicked," perhaps something like: "But he walks in the law of the Lord." This would create a nice parallel with the first verse; furthermore, it would be a true statement. Indeed, Psalm 119 opens with similar words: "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the law of the LORD."

But instead of that truth, Psalm 1:2 goes deeper, displaying the root of the matter:

but his delight is in the law of the LORD.

The opposite of disobedience is not obedience. The opposite of disobedience is delight.

Why? There are at least four biblical reasons:

### **First: God does not desire perfunctory obedience to a set of rules for worship or behavior.**

Again and again, God upbraids his people for thinking they can please him by going through the motions of obedience when their hearts do not belong to Him. Though He Himself instituted the sacrificial system, He says through Isaiah, "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? . . . I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats" (1:11). And Jesus rebukes the Pharisees of his day, who meticulously obeyed every commandment that others could see.

### **Second: God's Law, His Torah, is fundamentally not a set of rules for behavior.**

When we see the word "law" we think in legal terms. But in the Bible, God's Law, God's Torah (the Hebrew word), is not at heart a set of rules. Instead, the torah is God's instruction to us. We defined torah this way during our studies of Malachi:

*Torah is the revelation of God to man, fundamentally communicating His character, and consequently instructing us how to live in light of who God is. It is thus the foundation of any right view of the world, the foundation of any wisdom, any knowledge, any*

*insight. The true purpose of torah is to lead man into a fruitful, abundant, joyful life of fellowship with God, and thus with each other, and with all creation"*

### **Third: God's Torah commands us to love Him and to delight in Him!**

God's instruction to us shows that He is "gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love." We see that He has faithful love towards His people, and the power and might to protect them from all enemies. We see that we deserve nothing from Him but judgment, yet He showers grace and mercy on us. The proper response clearly is love, joy, and delight in Him. So He commands us: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). He commands us "Delight yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4). Even if we mistakenly think of the Law as a set of rules, outward obedience is not enough. The Law commands our love, our delight.

### **Fourth: We live an obedient life through cultivating delight in God, by cultivating love for Him, not by strengthening our willpower.**

Sin promises us greater joy if we give in to temptation. We often try to fight that sin by saying, "No, I must not do that; there's a rule I must follow that says I can't." We may be disciplined enough to resist in that way. But the result brings glory to our willpower, not glory to God. And the result is *not* biblical obedience. For we are not denying the fundamental satanic lie that the greatest joy is found in sin. God tells us that at His right hand are pleasures forevermore. True joy comes in following Him, in loving Him, not in giving in to temptation.

Thus, the opposite of disobedience is delight in God's Law, delight in God's character, loving God with all our heart, rejoicing in the access we have to God through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the question remains: Is He your delight? May we together cultivate joy in God, so that together we might become like Christ, taking on His character, spreading to all around us our joy in Him, to the glory of His Name.