

“If Any Man Willeth...”

Dub McClish

The most important factor in genuine obedience to God is found in the following words of Jesus: “If any man willeth to do His will, He shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself” (John 7:17). For one to obey God truly he must have the attitude of young Samuel: “Speak, Jehovah, for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:9-10). Let us not miss in these passages the emphasis on a **willing** compliance with God’s commands. Several important implications flow from this principle:

1. **God’s commands must be known before they can be obeyed.** One may do something that is in harmony with God’s Word, but if he does not know that God commanded it, there is no obedience of God. For example, a person may steal something from his neighbor and later repent of it, returning the item stolen and begging his neighbor’s forgiveness. While this is what God commands a thief to do, if the thief doesn’t know it and doesn’t repent because of God’s command, he has not obeyed God but has coincidentally complied with His Will. Obedience to God involves knowing what God requires and doing it because He requires it. It is not possible to obey God accidentally or ignorantly.
2. **One may comply with a command of God outwardly and still not obey God.** Jesus condemned the hypocrites of His day who sounded a trumpet when they gave to the poor and who sought attention when they prayed (Mat. 6:2-5). Such were outwardly complying with God’s commands to give alms and to pray, but they were doing it to receive praise of men and not to obey God. Some politicians may become very “pious” around election time or a salesman may be baptized to open up a new field of prospects, but neither have obeyed God. Only by **willing** compliance with God’s will does one fulfill the spirit as well as the letter of God’s commands.
3. **Partial, selective compliance with God’s Word is no obedience at all.** The “supermarket” approach (taking only what we want and bypassing the rest) of God’s Word is utterly invalid. The test of willingness to obey does not come regarding the commands with which we agree, but with those that conflict with our desires. The rich young ruler boasted of “keeping all of the commandments” until he was commanded to sell his estate. His refusal showed his lack of obedience to any of God’s commands. If we rebel against any single part of God’s law, we challenge all of it in principle (Jam. 2:10).

Proper motivation is at the root of true obedience to God.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, July 15, 1982, of which I was editor.]

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