

It's Not an Easy Road

“And, being assembled together with them,
commanded them
that they should not depart from
Jerusalem,
but wait for the promise of the Father,
which, saith he, ye have heard of me”
(Acts 1:4).

Acts began with a walk of obedience.

About 120 people walked a Sabbath day's journey to the upper room in Jerusalem. They waited seven to ten long days for the Holy Ghost, promised to those who obey God.

“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5:32).

Acts is a story of obedience. Jesus commanded, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

That is exactly what they did. They spread the gospel throughout the known world. Most of this took place after persecution hit the church and forced them to be scattered abroad.

“As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:3-4).

The believers in the New Testament church suffered because of their obedience to God.

They did it joyfully—both the obeying and the suffering for the name. In Acts 5, Peter and John were in jail. What was the charge? Healing a lame man in the name of Jesus. During the night, an angel opened the doors of the jail and released them.

“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life” (Acts 5:20, *NIV*).

This command, when obeyed, led to a cruel beating. Many think that obedience to God's commandments immediately brings blessings. At times, obeying God results in hardship and suffering. These men determined to obey God regardless of the cost and rejoiced at the opportunity to suffer for Jesus' name.

“And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:40-42).

Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake” (Luke 6:22).

“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner

appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:16-19).

The Story of Two Sauls

The Bible records the story of two Sauls. They lived many years apart, but both had an experience with obedience.

King Saul started out well, but ended poorly. Through acts of disobedience, he lost everything. He was a leadership letdown.

**"He who cannot obey must not command."
(Ben Franklin)**

"And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

**"Every great person has learned how to obey,
whom to obey and when to obey."
(William Ward)**

Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul) started out poorly, but ended well. Through an act of obedience, he gained the blessings of God. He was able to say, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

Knowing Your Destiny

Rev. J. W. Ansah preached a message entitled, "Knowing Your Destiny in the House of God." He believes that if believers understood their destiny (calling), it would minimize murmuring and complaining.

Saul knew from the beginning of his Christian experience that he would suffer many hardships.

"For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:16).

"Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:23-28, *NI V*).

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:10)

Serving God is not always an easy road.







How to Please God

Abba Anthony was asked, "What must one do to please God?"

- 1. Be aware of God's presence.
- 2. Obey God's Word.
- 3. Continue. Do not give up easily.

George Barna in *Evangelism That Works* believes that success is faithfulness and obedience to God. When we reach the end of life, all that will matter is whether we gave God control of our lives and were obedient to Him.

Barna defines obedience as a personal commitment to:

-  Christ as our Savior.
-  Living a life of holiness.
-  Consistent worship of God alone.
-  Pleasing God through our obedience to His commands.
-  Performing selfless acts of service to others, motivated by and reflecting our love for God and His people.
-  Sharing the good news of the gospel.

Eugene Peterson defined the Christian life as "a long obedience in the same direction."

Study Questions

- 1. Acts is the story of _____.
- 2. Many think obedience immediately brings blessings. How is this a misconception?

3. What was the major difference(s) between the two Sauls?

4. What Ben Franklin quotation is referred to in this lesson?

5. What did Saul of Tarsus understand from the beginning of his Christian experience?

6. What three things did Abba Anthony say must be done to please God?

7. What did Paul say in Philippians 3:10?

8. How did Eugene Peterson define the Christian life?

9. According to George Barna, what is success?

10. List three things we should have a personal commitment to according to George Barna?

