

Obedience to the Unenforceable

The teaching of "Obedience to the Unenforceable" as taught to me by Dad was not original. The earliest recollection of this teaching, by name, comes to us from a speech by Lord John Fletcher Moulton given in the meeting of The Author's Club in London, England in 1921. Through the years others have referenced it. On May 21, 1995 to the graduating class of Boston University, on the occasion of Dr. John Silber's twenty-fifth commencement as president of B.U., these words were spoken, "Lord Moulton considered the area of action lying between law and pure personal preference to be "the domain of obedience to the unenforceable." In this domain, he said, 'Obedience is the obedience of a man to that which he cannot be forced to obey. He is the enforcer of the law upon himself.' This domain between law and free choice he called that "manners." While it may include moral duty, social responsibility, and proper behavior, it extends beyond them to cover "all cases of doing right where there is no one to make you do it but yourself." I believe this statement defines the teaching best. What we need is a true revival in all matters of life so that we will live obedient to the higher calling of God on our lives, doing right when only God is watching, doing right without coercion or threatening. *"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14).

Today please allow me to challenge all of us to either stay true or initiate this great philosophy into our lives. Obedience to the unenforceable is the underlying principle of ...

1. The prayer of Christ in Gethsemane.

"And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:41, 42). Without going into a detailed theological discussion on what this prayer meant, allow me to conjecture that this was not a prayer to escape the cross, for Christ had prophesied repeatedly that He was to die and be buried and rise again from the dead, (Matthew 16:21). So, the prayer was not an attempt to be exempt from the cross. I believe the Father revealed to our Lord the final cost of that cross, which was not only to die for man's sin, but to do the one thing that truly made it an efficacious death - become sin (II Corinthians 5:21) for us. This was so incredibly distasteful to His holy nature that he prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane to see if there was any other way. After communing with the Father enough to know now that, beyond any shadow of doubt, this was the only way to truly handle man's sin problem, He with dedicated resolve, says "Amen" to the Father's plan. *"Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him"* (John 8:28, 29). This teaching moves beyond the practical and through our Lord's obedience becomes sacred. Obedience to the unenforceable...

2. Keeps us virtuous in the dark.

God said to His prophet Jeremiah, *"Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth"* (Ezekiel 8:12). In other words, God was saying the mature men that should know better are behaving in an unsatisfactory manner, because they are acting as though I am not aware of what they do in the hallways of their imagination, the deepest resources of their privacy. God sees in the dark places! Nothing is hid from Him. Jesus said, *"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known"* (Luke 12:2). Later in the Bible it reads, *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do"* (Hebrews 4:13). Obedience to the unenforceable is doing right because we are constantly aware of God's all-seeing eye. And finally, obedience to the unenforceable...

3. Holds us true in the hour of personal temptation.

You will not find a biblical character with a more pristine testimony in the Old Testament than Joseph. He was mistreated and sold down into Egypt by his own jealous brothers and while in the house of Potiphar was confronted with the likes of temptation that would fall many a young man, but not our hero, Joseph. He stood against the onslaught of wicked enticements, even to the point of facing personal harm for not caving in to wrong. We see his determination to do right in these words: "*But he refused...*" (Genesis 39:8). "*There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God*"? (Genesis 39:9).

Doing right is behavior not modified by circumstances. It is not subject to situational ethics, which teaches in some matters it would be more expedient to do wrong. I like what Dr. Bob Jones often said, "It is right to do right; it is wrong to do wrong; and it is never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right." In *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*, a book by David F. Wells, the author views the infusion of popular culture into the Church as evidence of a diminution of the Church's vision of God and suggests that in our eagerness to be relevant, we have become merely desperate.

May God help the Church to move beyond desperation to become acceptable with man and become ever more motivated to do God's will in God's way, while leaving the results up to Him. Please understand that leaving the results up to God is not a random abandonment that reaps haphazard results, because the Scriptures teach, "*For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly*" (Psalm 84:11). Let us do right for right's sake and above all, for Christ's sake.

- Pastor Pope -

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