

## THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS FROM OBEDIENCE

*4<sup>18</sup>Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please, let me go, so that I may return to my people who are in Egypt and see if they are still alive." Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."<sup>19</sup>Now Jehovah had said to Moses in Midian, "Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who attempted to kill you are dead."<sup>20</sup>So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey and returned to the land of Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.*

*<sup>21</sup>Then Jehovah said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart, and he will not let the people go."<sup>22</sup>You shall say to Pharaoh, This is what Jehovah says: Israel is my son, my first born,<sup>23</sup>and I have told you, Let my son go, so that he may serve me, but you have refused to let him go. Listen. I will kill your son, your first born."*

*<sup>24</sup>At a lodging place on the way, Jehovah met Moses and attempted to kill him.<sup>25</sup>Then Zipporah took a flint knife and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at his feet. She said, "You are surely a bridegroom of blood to me!"<sup>26</sup>So [Jehovah] left him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood," referring to the circumcision. (Ex. 4:18-26)*

### **Introduction**

Two missionaries, Curt and Milton, were traveling up the Uraricoera River in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon jungle. They were in the sixth day of a canoe trip from their mission base at Boa Vista heading to a remote Indian village. Before they reached their destination, somewhere along the rain-swollen river their little canoe overturned in the rapids.

As he was being swept over the raging rapids, Curt managed to grasp an empty gasoline can as a life preserver. He also managed to grab the rope of the canoe as it went careening by. Milton was sucked under into the total darkness of a whirlpool. In his final moments of consciousness he cried out to the LORD. The next thing he knew, he was back on the surface, swimming towards Curt.

Exhausted, but alive, the two missionaries struggled onto a mound of relatively dry land. They struggled to pull the canoe to shore: though it was severely twisted, it's motor was still attached. Eventually, the two men managed to construct a crude shelter from the rain out of tree branches. As they sat shivering and starving in their makeshift shelter, they had several close calls with huge and hungry snakes.

But this divinely imposed time of fasting and danger had a spiritual purpose: during the next three days, long hours were spent in singing, reciting Scripture, confessing sins and repenting. Both men came to realize that they had slipped into the practice of doing the LORD's work in a manner that was unworthy of Him. Both men recognized that lesser things had taken the LORD's place of first priority in their lives.

As soon as they understood what the LORD was teaching them through this experience, things started happening. After hours of one man praying and the other cranking on the cord of the outboard motor, the motor sputtered to life. With one last heroic effort, the two anemic men shoved the canoe into the open water and were on their way. Once out in the middle of the river, they were spotted by a rescue plane that directed them down the right tributaries to the waiting rescue party. (POWER, 7/5/92)

Moses could relate to all of this. He, too, had to learn a similar lesson in a similar way, the lesson that there are no exemptions from obedience. None of us may lose sight of the fact that God's requirement of faithful obedience applies to each one of us at all times without exception. We must remember that God has called us to serve Him, therefore we are not exempt from obeying Him.

### **I. You are Not Exempt from Obeying God, No Matter Who You Are**

Following his encounter with the LORD at the burning bush, Moses returns to his father-in-law, Jethro, and informs him of his intention to return to Egypt. What an improbable, even laughable, figure he seems to be: one single man, leading a wife and two young sons seated upon a donkey, about to confront the ruler of the mightiest nation on earth! But he had received a divine commission from God to be His ambassador, and the staff he held in his hand had now become the rod of God (Ex. 4:20.)

As Moses sets out on this journey back to Egypt, to fulfill his calling as God's appointed deliverer of His people, the LORD assures him of his divine commission and of his ultimate success in carrying out that commission: *"Now Jehovah had said to Moses in Midian, 'Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who attempted to kill you are dead'"* (Ex. 4:19.)

But then, in the middle of the night, as they are bunked down at "the local motel," the LORD came and attempted to kill him! (vs. 24.) Moses' wife, Zipporah, springs into action to save his life: she grabs the hunting knife and hastily performs an operation of circumcision on their little son (vs. 25.) Then we read that the LORD *"left him alone"* (vs. 26;) His divine anger was appeased and He withdrew from His attack against Moses.

What was this all about? What did Moses have to learn from this incident? What must we learn from this passage?

The LORD's anger was aroused against Moses and He rose up against him because Moses had failed to circumcise his (younger?) son. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the sign of the covenant, and it was a mandatory requirement for all the sons of Abraham, note Genesis 17:9-10,14,

*God said to Abraham, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you, and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is [the sign of] my covenant that you shall keep—[the covenant between] me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised ... ..<sup>14</sup>The uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that man shall be cut off from his people, because he has broken my covenant. (Genesis 17:9-10,14)*

It was Moses' solemn responsibility as a Hebrew father to circumcise his sons; how much more was it his responsibility to do so as the divinely appointed leader and deliverer of God's covenant people!

This is the lesson God so forcibly brought home to Moses in no uncertain terms: There are no exceptions when it comes to obedience, no matter who you are. Before Moses could call upon Israel and upon Pharaoh to submit to God's commandment, Moses himself had to submit to God's commandment. No one, not even Moses, is exempt from the requirement of obedience.

This is the lesson you and I must take to heart: There are no exceptions when it comes to obedience, no matter who you are.

There are no exceptions because of spiritual service. Consider the example of David. David served God by establishing the kingdom of Israel and ruling over it with justice, but the LORD did not therefore tolerate his acts of sin: *"Why did you despise the word of Jehovah by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup>Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own"* (2 Sam. 12:9-10.) This was the word of the LORD that came to David after he had caused Uriah to be intentionally exposed to the heat of the battle so that he might be killed and then might take his wife, Bathsheba, with whom David had previously committed adultery. We must avoid the fallacy that reasons, "Because I am serving God (in the church or elsewhere), I am sure He will excuse misconduct in my business life or personal moral life (the two young missionaries featured in the Introduction had to learn this lesson.)

There are no exemptions because of spiritual privilege. Consider the example of Hezekiah. King Hezekiah received a miraculous healing and a special sign from God, but when his response was sinful pride rather than humble gratitude, he and the whole nation paid for it: *"Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore Jehovah's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem"* (2 Chron. 32:25.) We must avoid the fallacy that reasons, "God has given me extraordinary spiritual gifts, or blessings, (perhaps special answers to prayer or a dramatic healing), I must be special, He will not hold me accountable for my misconduct and neglect of His commandments."

There are no exemptions because of position. Consider the example of King Ahab. The wicked queen Jezebel wrongfully sought to convince King Ahab that because he was the king he was above the law: *"Jezebel his wife said, 'Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I will get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite'"* (1 Kgs. 21:7.) She counseled Ahab to abuse his royal power by willfully and sinfully seizing his neighbor's vineyard that he coveted for himself. But the LORD held him accountable, He sent the prophet Elijah to Ahab with the following message: *"This is what the LORD says, 'Have you not murdered a man and seized his property? ... In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood'"* (1 Kgs. 21:19.) We must avoid the fallacy that reasons, "Because I occupy a position of authority in the church (perhaps as pastor or elder or deacon), I am not accountable for my conduct." Whenever tempted to such thinking, bear in mind 1 Peter 5:2-3, *"shepherd the flock of God that is among you ....<sup>3</sup>... be examples for the flock."*

There are no exemptions because of prestige. We must avoid the fallacy that reasons, "Because I am a prominent, active, charter member of the local church, or a big financial contributor to the church, my misconduct will be excused and overlooked. Whenever tempted to such thinking, bear in mind Deuteronomy 10:17, *"Jehovah your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes."*

There are no exemptions because of religious affiliation. Consider the example of the Pharisees, to whom John the Baptist protested, *"You brood of vipers, ...<sup>8</sup>Produce fruit in keeping with repentance, <sup>9</sup>and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham"* (Matt. 3:7-9.) We must avoid the fallacy that reasons, "My baptism, or church membership, gives me standing with God and cancels out or overrides my disobedient conduct." Whenever tempted to such thinking, bear in mind Romans 8:1-4, a passage in which the Apostle Paul explains that we have been redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ *"in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us"* (Rom. 8:4.) There are no exemptions because of spiritual status. We must avoid the fallacy that reasons, "I am a child of God, He loves me, therefore He will surely indulge my disobedient conduct. Whenever tempted to such thinking, bear in mind 1 Peter 1:17, *"if you call upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, live your remaining time [on earth] in fear."*

There are no exemptions from obedience, because we are called for obedience, such is the ultimate purpose and end of salvation:

*It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—it is not of works, therefore no one can boast.<sup>10</sup> We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance in order for us to walk in them.* (Eph. 2:8-10)

## II. You are Not Exempt from Obeying God, Even in the “Little Things”

You can understand (though not excuse) Moses’ failure to circumcise his (younger?) son: his wife, Zipporah, was opposed to it. Consider her actions and attitude. As soon as the LORD displays His anger against Moses, she immediately circumcises her son—she knew what was the cause of the problem. She flings the bloody foreskin at Moses’ feet and in a tone of disgust calls him *“a bridegroom of blood”* (vs. 25.)

You can understand Moses’ reasoning with regard to this matter. The sacrament of circumcision, (and what it represents: original sin), may have been offensive to Zipporah; or else, it was painful to her as a mother to inflict any pain upon her little child. To keep peace in the home, to avoid a big hassle, Moses may have initially postponed the required act, only to find that as the child grew it became harder to perform the required circumcision. For one reason or another, the act was never performed. Perhaps Moses eventually rationalized: “Such a relatively insignificant act is not worth the big hassle with Zipporah—and is this not confirmed by the fact God initially issued His divine call despite the neglected act of circumcision and without even bringing up the matter?”

But in due time there would come a divine confrontation with regard to this matter of neglect and disobedience to a clear and known commandment of God. Moses would be taught in no uncertain terms the lesson that there are no exemptions when it comes to obedience, even with regard to “the little things.” It is not for Moses to categorize God’s commandments into degrees of importance; it is his duty to obey them all. It is not his prerogative to sacrifice obedience to God for the sake of peace within the home; it is his responsibility to give the LORD first priority in his life and in his home.

This is the lesson you and I must take to heart: There are no exemptions when it comes to obedience—not even with regard to “the little things.” Obedience in “the little things” is an accurate gauge by which God measures our commitment to Him: *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is undependable with very little will also be undependable with much”* (Lk. 16:10.) Note: The Greek word ἀδίκος, meaning “unrighteous,” or, “evil,” here has the sense of “undependable,” or, “dishonest.” Our conduct with regard to “little things” reveals the principles by which our life is governed. By way of illustration: If you would steal something as insignificant as a dollar bill, and could not even exercise the minimal amount of integrity to abstain on that elementary level, how could you possibly assume that you would exercise the godly attribute of integrity when the stakes were higher and the temptation greater and the object of desire more appealing?

Obedience in “the little things” can spare you from having to encounter more severe demands for obedience: *“Because you have been faithful (in your present trial) ... I in turn will be faithful to keep you from the hour of trial that is going to*

*come upon the whole world in order to test those who live on the earth"* (Rev. 3:10.) Because the church in Philadelphia was faithful in their present trial, the Lord declares that He will spare them from having to undergo a greater trial. By way of illustration: The kids invited Billy to join them in stealing apples from the tree in the old lady's backyard, but Billy refused. Some years later when the same gang made plans to steal a car, they didn't even bother to ask Bill if he cared to join them.

Obedience with regard to "the little things" opens up greater avenues of responsibility and service to Christ: *"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will give you charge over many things. Enter into the joy of your master'"* (Matt. 25:21.)

## **Conclusion**

This is the lesson Moses had to learn, and you and I must learn as well: Because God has called us to serve Him, there are no exemptions from obeying Him. If there is some area in your life where you are knowingly withholding obedience from God, somewhere and sometime you are going to have your own encounter with God. He may disturb your peace, He may disrupt your family, He may even seek to take your life. Let us take a lesson from the Psalmist, and let us make his prayer our own: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. <sup>24</sup>See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"* (Psl. 139:23-24.)