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Obedience and Trust

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Obedience and Trust

When we choose to obey other humans, we might or might not trust them to have our best interests in mind. In considering obedience to the inspirations of God, the trust we bring to the relationship can make obedience not only possible, but attractive.

We usually think of obedience as a restriction on our freedom. Linking trust to obedience might not spontaneously occur to us. But when we trust God, obedience is an appropriate and satisfying manner of relating. The more familiar we become with day to day manifestations of God's detailed and practical love for us, the more readily do we seek direction, and follow the guidance we are given.

When we consult knowledgeable people before making decisions, we retain the option of accepting or not agreeing with the advice we are given. We know that those we ask might have their own agenda and that they cannot know us completely, nor can they appreciate fully all aspects of the situations confronting us. God knows us as both Creator and Lover, and knows the short and long-term consequences of our actions. If we ask, and ask in trust, the proper response to the answers we receive is obedience, nothing less.

We might wish that we could know the future, so that we would be able to make decisions with complete foresight. God does know, far better than we, all the ramifications of the decisions we might be considering, and sees with utter clarity all that is possible for us and all that is not. In trusting God to help us in making decisions, we become free of the impossible burden of needing to know it all. If our welfare and that of others of God's beloved people is at stake, how could God not aid us in coming to a quiet sense of "this is the right thing to do" rather than leave us in a state of confusion? When we ask, and then follow the ordinary inspirations we receive, we act in obedience based on trust.

We learn through our many experiences of seeking God's guidance to notice the small signs and movements within us as that indicate their origin in God. Inspirations frequently arise within us, but we can also recognize external signs as revelatory of God's intentions on our behalf. Circumstances, and especially the words and actions of other persons often reveal to us the details of our calling. God works for our good even through the commands of mere mortals, whether they are well-intentioned or not.

Many of us have been irritated by someone telling us what to do, especially when he or she did not seem to respect us. We still had a decision to make: whether to carry out the indicated action or not. If we recognized that it was better for us to do what we were told than to refuse, we might well have been "obeying God," while not agreeing with or condoning the disrespect shown to us. By the grace of God we are often able to separate out the feelings we have about how a command is given from the more spiritual feelings of "right or wrong" upon which we base our decisions. There really are no circumstances in which God cannot work with us and for us.

When Mary said "yes" to the message from God about becoming the mother of the Savior, she trusted God, and she trusted her capacity to recognize God's way of relating with her. When Jesus stayed behind in the Temple at twelve years of age, and Mary and Joseph conveyed quite strongly their position, he went home with them. He obeyed, trusting the ordinary relationship of child to parents. When Jesus was in the garden, asking the Father to let him avoid the pain and suffering he could clearly see coming to him, he trusted. He did not turn aside, but obeyed that deep down sense he had that love of the Father and of us required the full acceptance of human limitations, including death.

Even if we cannot comprehend the mystery of trust and obedience in our relationship with God, we might still find consolation in the practice of asking God, at the point of making a decision, "What do you want me to do?"