

Ready to Obey and Serve

an extract from "The Lay Driven Church" by Melvin J Steinbron

At one of my seminars in Pennsylvania, a man stood to his feet and exclaimed, "Sir, in the Church Of Jesus Christ there are no volunteers We are either obedient to God or disobedient!- He said this with conviction. He is right. Moses, when called by God, had five good reasons not to do what God was calling him to do. He was attracted by the bush which, though burning, was not consumed. God used that phenomenon to get his attention so he could call him to go to Egypt and liberate his people. God has his ways of getting our attention, doesn't He!

The account of Moses is given in chapters 3 and 4 of Exodus. (The following is my paraphrase of the account.)

God said, "I have come down to rescue my people from slavery." Moses was thrilled to hear this, but his thrill was short lived. It turned into a chill when God told him how he was going to do it: 'I am sending you.' Moses pulled back. He resisted God on five fronts: identity, authority, acceptance, competence and volition. Do these sound strangely familiar? I have resisted God on all these fronts, and unless you are very different, you have too. The word "but" must have alerted God to Moses' strong objections. Moses' response should have been, 'Okay God, what do I do first?' But who can fault him? The task was huge.

The first resistance:

"Who am I that I should do this?" He felt unworthy and unprepared. Not bad reasoning. He was unworthy and unprepared for such a task. But that was not the issue. The issue was that God called him to do it. It was an identity issue. The question, "Who am I?" (3:11) is not the right one. The right one is, Who is calling me? Moses missed the fact that God has the right to call anyone He chooses. Moses was God's servant. God, being understanding and patient, promised, 'I will be with you' (v. 12).

The second resistance:

'I don't have the authority. They will ask, 'Who sent you?' Of course, he didn't have the authority in and of himself. No one had commissioned him - until now. The issue was one of authority. God gave him authority on the spot: 'Tell them I AM [Jehovah] has sent me to you.'

The third resistance:

'What if they do not accept me?' This issue was one of acceptance. No one wants to enter a situation where rejection is a risk. The likelihood of being rejected was real. But so what? A lost battle doesn't mean a lost war. God gave Moses two signs to assure eventual acceptance.

The fourth resistance:

'I am not competent.' This was no flimsy excuse; he was not compe-tent. On the issue of competence, you and I need Paul's admission followed by his assurance to the Corinthian Christians, 'Not that we are competent in ourselves ... our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers (2 Cor. 3:5,6). God's promise, 'Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say,' should have brought him to obedience.

The fifth resistance:

'Oh, Lord (he still called him Lord), please send someone else to do it.' The issue now was volition. He didn't want to go. This angered God. Then we read, 'Moses went.' God's anger did it! Moses must have still felt uncertain, but he knew God meant business. By being obedient throughout the ensuing months, Moses discovered how much God meant business. The Lord was with him. Moses did have authority-his people and the pharaoh took him seriously. He was accepted, he was competent-he got the job done.

All of Moses' objections are very real for people called to be lay pastors. Who is worthy to pastor others? Who has authority to be a pastor? Who does not fear rejection? Who is competent to do

God's work? Who would not prefer someone else doing the really hard tasks? Our objections can seem valid, because they are born of the first part of these two-part truths:

- ♦ You are not worthy; however, God's call makes you worthy
- ♦ You do not have the authority; however, God gives you authority.
- ♦ You may not be accepted; however, God will use you anyway.
- ♦ You are not competent; however, God is your competence.
- ♦ You want someone else to go; however, God has chosen you.

I do not believe God minds hearing our objections. He has been listening to peoples' objections for millennia. In fact, whatever our true thoughts and feelings, we need to get them out. God will not chasten or shame us. He will listen carefully, then graciously assure us of His presence and provisions. He just wants us to hang in there until all the reasons are out. Then we are ready to obey with our whole hearts. Returning to the words of the man who said, "In the Church, there are no volunteers. We are either obedient to God or disobedient" and remembering that every Christian is a minister, let's look at the difference between a volunteer and a minister:

- ♦ A volunteer offers himself or herself for service;
- ♦ A minister responds to a call from God for service.

- ♦ A volunteer's service is an option at his or her convenience;
- ♦ A minister's service is not an option, but is a matter of obedience to God.

- ♦ A volunteer is master of his or her own life and time;
- ♦ A minister acknowledges Jesus as Lord of his or her life and time.

- ♦ A volunteer is accountable to the organization and its leaders;
- ♦ A minister is accountable first to God, then to the organization and its leaders.

- ♦ A volunteer is motivated by need and recognition;
- ♦ A minister is motivated by the Spirit, the Christian community and need.

- ♦ A volunteer reserves the right to choose what he or she will do;
- ♦ A minister relinquishes the choice of what he or she will do to the higher principle of spiritual gifts and divine call.

So ... the man was right. We are not volunteers; we are obedient servants. And by being obedient, we experience what Jesus meant by, 'Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it' (Matt. 16:25). Losing one's life equates with obedience to God's call.

Obey and serve are two sides of the same coin. Obedience is the inner attitude. Serving is the outer act.

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