

Do NOT Obey the Gospel ... (!?)

We rightly emphasize the importance of obeying the gospel. (See "[Obeying the Gospel](#)") So on one of my trips to Monterrey, Mexico, it felt strange to find myself trying to talk someone OUT of obeying the gospel!

I was approached by a woman whose 10-year-old son wanted to be baptized. Wonderful!, but the Bible is very clear on several points, including **who can obey** (the proper *candidates*), and especially **why** (the *purpose* of baptism: to wash away sins). *During a short interview with him and his mother, I learned the following:*

The **purposes** they had in mind were as follows:

- 1) *He* wanted to **take part** in the public services, and
- 2) *She* wanted him to start early on the right path so he would **remain faithful**, rather than follow in his unfaithful *father's* footsteps.

These are both noble desires, but neither is a proper reason for being baptized.

I also emphasized to her that **baptism is no guarantee of faithfulness**. A commitment is needed, one that can be nurtured even *before* baptism, one which will help motivate a person to obey the Lord, and one which will help a person remain faithful to Jesus, regardless of whether or not the person participates publicly. In fact, on that same trip, I met two people who had been baptized at age 10. One was grossly immoral, and the other was clearly aloof and disinterested in all things spiritual.

The fact that he did NOT have proper motivation was also obvious when I asked him,

"Have you sinned against God, or against your mom and dad?" – **He wasn't sure.**

"If you died tonight, would you go to be with God, or go to the devil?" – **He wasn't sure.**

Without the awareness of one's own sins, one cannot be baptized "**for the remission of sins,**" which is to be one's purpose in calling on the Lord in that act. (**Acts 2:21, 37-38; 22:11-16;** etc.) In fact, the Bible **ONLY** speaks of being baptized in order to wash away sins and become Jesus' disciple. (**Matthew 28:18; Romans 6:1-4;** etc.) So I tried to compliment and encourage their good desires, but **DIS**couraged him from being baptized that night.

Such an experience is probably played out time and again in homes with Christian parents of conscientious young people. It makes me revisit the question of **WHEN** a person is "old enough" to obey. Consider these two axioms:

"Readiness" is NOT dependent on **age** alone. (*Aside: I heard one person try to artificially connect it to puberty, suggesting that a person cannot truly believe in Jesus unless s/he believes in the virgin birth, which cannot (so the argument goes) be understood by the prepubescent child. By this reasoning, a person would have to study the various laws of nature and physics in order to believe in Jesus' miracles! And so we see how efforts to define "the age of accountability" in biological or chronological terms can run aground.*)

"Readiness" is NOT dependent on **knowledge** alone. To borrow from **1 Corinthians 8:1**, "We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."

I submit that the intellect ("the head") allows one to **understand one's inadequacies and responsibilities before God**, but only the feelings ("the heart") can **motivate a person to obey**. (**Acts 2:37; 16:29-30**)

Your HEAD...

Believes that Jesus is the Son of God and that He should be your Lord and Master (**Acts 2:36**)

Knows that you have sinned, and need to be saved by God (**Acts 2:23, 37**)

Knows the steps to complete to follow Jesus (repent, confess, be baptized – **Acts 2:38; 8:37**)

Your HEART...

Feels lost without God and the **need** to follow

Feels bad and **sad** about your sin (even cries)

Wants to put you under His divine control

Wants to be **right** with God – *deeply, like a hunger*

(See the Beatitudes of **Matthew 5** as well as the attitudes in **James 4:7-10**.)

If all you have is what your HEAD tells you, you know you "SHOULD" obey the gospel (which describes a great many people!), like I know I "SHOULD" exercise more! But when your HEART moves you to obey **for the right reasons** (because of what your HEAD knows), then people will be able to say about **you** . . .

God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. – **Romans 6:17**

So far be it from me to talk you out of obeying the gospel! Obey today, for all the right reasons!