

Obedience and Church Growth

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1. Obedience: the New Testament concept.
 - a. The pattern of our obedience: Christ, who was obedient even to the point of dying the undeserved death of a criminal (Phil. 2:5,8).
 - b. Paul's concept: taking even our thoughts as captives to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5)
 - c. Christians are to be "obedient children" (1 Peter 1:14)
 - d. Obedience based on faithful response to hearing God's commands. We do not only need to know what to obey, we also need to obey what we know!
2. Levels of authority in regard to obedience
 - a. The first level: the commands of God (the very basic ones, according to George Patterson in Church Planting Through Obedience Oriented Teaching).
 - i. Repent and believe (Mark 1:5)
 - ii. Be baptized (Acts 2:38)
 - iii. Love (John 13:34)
 - iv. Celebrate the Lord's supper (Luke 22:17-20)
 - v. Pray (John 16:24)
 - vi. Give (Matthew 6:19-21)
 - vii. Witness (Matthew 28:18-20)
 - viii. Exercise spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-11)

We add to this list:

- ix. Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
- x. Make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20).
- xi. Be holy (1 Pet. 1:13-16).
- b. The second level: apostolic practices which were not commanded (e.g., laying hands on new believers), which should be neither commanded nor prohibited.
- c. The third level: human customs (having a church building, the form of church government, the order of worship service, etc.). These should fit the cultural context.

Note: Patterson contends that most church splits and fights come because people elevate second and third level commands to first level status.

3. Developing towards obedience: some reflections from developmental theories.

- a. Four major schools of developmental theory and their positions may be noted (Salkind, Theories of Human Development, p. 12):

Theory	Maturational	Psychoanalytic	Behavioral	Organismic
Basic assumptions	The sequence of development is determined by biological factors and the evolutionary history of the species.	Development consists of dynamic, structural, and sequential components and a continuously reviewed need for satisfaction of instincts.	Development occurs according to the laws of learning and places great importance on events in the environment.	Development consists of the addition and modification of psychological structures. The organism assumes an active role in the process.
Philosophical rationale	Recapitulation theory	Embryology	<i>Tabula rasa</i>	Predeterminism
What variables are studied?	Biological systems of growth	Effects of instinctual needs on behavior	Frequency of behavior	Stage-related transformations
How is development studied?	Using cinematic records, co-twin studies, normative approach	Through verbal associations and indirect examination of conflicts	Conditioning and modeling paradigms	Problem solving during transitional points in development.
Areas of greatest impact	Child rearing and the importance of biological determinants	Personality development and the relationship between culture and behavior.	Systematic analysis of behavior, treatment and management of deviant behaviors, educational applications	Understanding of cognitive processes

- b. Lawrence Kohlberg notes six stages in development of moral reasoning (adapted from Duska and Whelan, Moral Development, pp. 45-79):

Level	Orientation	Stage	Name	Description	Reason for Action(s)
Pre- Conventional	Self	1	Punishment-Obedience	Focus is on the physical consequences of the action, which determine whether it is good or bad. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right.	Fear of God's or man's punishment
		2	Instrumental-Relativist	Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Elements of fairness, reciprocity and equal sharing are present, but are always interpreted pragmatically ("You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours").	Hope of God's or man's reward
Conventional	Society	3	Interpersonal-Concordance ("Good Boy--Nice Girl")	Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. Behavior is frequently judged by intention: "He means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice".	Societal companionship (feel part of a family)
		4	Law and Order	Society is more important than the self--we have duty to obey society and this overrides our own concerns. Right behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.	It is my duty (law of Church)
Post Conventional Autonomous Principles	God	5	Social Contract Legalistic	Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and in terms of standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. Relative values are respected, and rules need to be followed to reach consensus on what the society's laws should be. However, aside from society's laws, the individual has a right to choose his/her own personal values and opinions. We have freedom to change society's laws when all agree to change them.	God is a God who can be trusted
		6	Principled-Universal	Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the golden rule) and are not concrete moral rules like the ten commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of the human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.	Because I love and trust God.

- c. How do we proceed from one stage to the next? Kohlberg presents four qualities of stage development:
- i. **Stage development is invariant.** One must progress through the stages in order, and one cannot get to a higher stage without passing through the stage immediately preceding it.
 - ii. **In stage development, subjects cannot comprehend moral reasoning at a stage more than one stage beyond their own.** Thus a person at stage two, who discriminates good and bad on the basis of his own pleasure, cannot comprehend reasoning at stage four which appeals to fixed duties the performance of which need not offer any promise of reward or pleasure.
 - iii. **In stage development subjects are cognitively attracted to reasoning one level above their own predominant level.**
 - iv. **In stage development, movement through the stages is effected when**

cognitive disequilibrium is created, that is, when a person's cognitive outlook is not adequate to cope with a given moral dilemma. The belief of developmental theory, bolstered by the evidence, is that a person will look for more and more adequate ways of resolving dilemmas. If in a given situation one's cognitive framework cannot resolve a problem, the cognitive organism adjusts to a framework which does.

4. Case study in light of Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning: Obedience oriented church growth. The following steps are presents as "obedience-oriented church growth". In light of Kohlberg's presentation, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
 - a. Focus on obedience, not knowledge (John 7:17). Patterson contends that true knowledge comes as a result of obedience, and not the other way around.
 - b. Focus on obedience to Christ, not to the teacher/preacher.
 - c. Do not wait for some stage of "maturity" before you teach them to obey--they grow through obedience at their level of knowledge.
 - d. Be sure you demand obedience to Christ's commands, not human practices!
 - e. Take people progressively along, not allowing movement to the next step until obedience to the present step is secured.
 - i. Some basic suggested units to work through:

The Holy Spirit, baptism, witnessing, discipline, discipleship, extension, spiritual gifts, organization in the church, reproducing churches, spiritual warfare, etc.
 - ii. Remember to gear all your teaching to obedience, not just knowledge.