

## Obedience, the Problem Word

The beginning of faith is obedience to the word of God. And obedience is the 'cutting off' of one's own self-will. When God called Abraham to leave his home in Ur and dwell in the land of Canaan, Abraham was perfectly obedient. There was no hesitation or doubtful questioning if this was the right thing to do. Abraham heard God's word and acted upon it, immediately. He "went." "So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him" (Gen. 12:4). Genuine faith is trust. Abraham knew that the LORD was the only one Who was worthy of his trust. So it must be for us. "Self-denial" is not a masochistic abnegation of personhood (as it is in many oriental spiritualities), but the deliberate transference of trust from the self to God, from the ego to Christ. "Nevertheless, not my will, but Your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). Through these words, the New Adam in Gethsemane's garden opens the way to Eden's garden for all.

But obedience is a problem word today. We moderns, after all, are a people who prize freedom of choice and the exaltation of the self above all things. In this way, it is the will-of-the-self that has become the highest good, and anything that defies this exalted good is to be cut down as the greatest of all evils. As one contemporary Orthodox theologian writes, *"Today, the will of the self, we habitually assume, is sovereign to the degree that it is obedient to nothing else and is free to the degree that it is truly spontaneous and constrained by nothing greater than itself. So, it is this will that has become the highest good imaginable."* (D. B. Hart).

It does not matter that this complete deference to the will-of-the-self has resulted in chaotic spontaneity, that this spontaneity has degenerated into compulsivity, and that this compulsivity has morphed ours into a society of addicts - the complete negation of freedom in the first place. "My will be done!" - no matter what the consequences is the individual's creed.

Christ's call to us is an obedience that is not forceful or controlling. It is a gentle invitation to surrender ourselves wholly to His love and wisdom. From which comes the only true freedom.

Fr. Paul Jannakos