

## Hearing | Romans 1:1-7 | July 2, 2017

NOTE: Last Sunday we explored regions of the Holy Spirit's activity. There was synergy between the Holy Spirit as dynamic communicator and dynamic producer of good things, gifts, qualities, creation, etc. The beginning of Paul's letter to Christ followers living in Rome is embedded in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This letter, as well as all others found in the New Testament, reveals the “God breathed” essence behind the writings. The writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write to specific places, peoples and situations. This is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit – to communicate to the church using inspired and authoritative documents from the first century. But His work was not finished in the first century. The Spirit continues to speak, reveal, convict, teach, confirm, and transform His church today. We must be careful not act as I did when my wife stopped asking me to take out the trash for the third time without response – because the Holy Spirit may just stop speaking when we stop acting on His words. This leads toward the theme for Sunday – how do we understand “obedience” and do we need to recalibrate our understanding of this word/action?

*...to bring about the **obedience** of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations. (Ro 1:5b)*

Literal = for obedience of faith among all the nations.

Parker Palmer, *To Know as we are Known*, (Harper & Roe, 1983).

The word “obedience” does not mean slavish, uncritical adherence; it comes from the Latin root **audire**, which means “*to listen.*” Obedience requires the discerning ear, the ear that listens for the reality of the situation, a listening that allows the hearer to respond to that reality, whatever it may be. 43

That is the basic bond of the community of truth? What kind of relationship does truth call us into? As the story of Abba Felix suggests, the word that best applies is “obedience”—not slavish adherence to authority, but careful listening and responding in a conversation of free selves... Jesus says, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31). Here Jesus not only links knowing truth with obedience, but he also connects obedience with freedom... Today we conceive of freedom and obedience as contradictory states. We regard freedom as the autonomy of the self-seeking self, the self cut loose from traditional and communal bonds, and we think of obedience as the act of slaves, not free persons. 66

At its root, the word “obedience” means not only “to listen” but “to listen from below.” How fascinating that this is also the commonsense meaning of the word “understand,” which suggests that we know something by “standing under” it. Both obedience and understanding imply submitting ourselves to something larger than any one of us, something on which we all depend. Both imply subjecting ourselves to the communal bonds of truth. 67

The view that truth is personal leads neither to objective imperialism nor subjective relativism. Instead, truth is found as we are obedient to a pluralistic reality, as we engage in that patient process of

dialogue, consensus seeking, and personal transformation in which all parties subject themselves to the bonds of communal truth. Such a way of knowing is more likely to bridge our gaps and divisions than drive us farther apart. Such a way of knowing can help heal us and our broken world. 68

The key to the rule of truth in teaching and learning is found in that word “obedience,” which means to listen with a discerning ear and respond faithfully to the personal implications of what one has heard... It means making a personal response that acknowledges that one is in truth with the speaker and with the words he or she speaks. 89

Leslie Dewart, offers a partial clue to the nature of obedience to truth. Truth, he says, “is a *fidelity* [“strict observance of promises, duties, loyalty, conjugal faithfulness”] rather than a *conformity*. What is the difference between the two? *Conformity* is a relation towards another which is owing to another by reason of the other’s nature. *Fidelity* is a relation towards another which one owes to oneself by reason of one’s own nature. Conformity obligates from the outside. Fidelity obligates from within. 90

Esther Lightcap Meek, *Loving to Know*, (Cascade Books, 2011).

Mike Williams feels it important to say that authority properly utilized is never authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is “Trust me, period, no matter what.” Biblical authority doesn’t work this way. Good authority gives, through relationship, reasons to trust it... Williams notes that the best authorities will appeal to us across the whole spectrum of human experience and knowing. They will be rational, testable, and practical... God calls his people to obey, and he also gives mighty acts as empirical testimony. And he invites us to live in relationship and see the benefits of it.” By contrast, in our culture, authority has been misunderstood to be identical to authoritarianism. It is thought to be mindless, requiring resigned compliance. Instead, says Williams, authority ought to be, you have to trust me, but I have given you reasons to trust me. To accredit authority as viable and responsible, and to see ourselves as responsible in trusting authority, is completely alien to the Enlightenment, rationalist mind. In epistemology, counting authority as a source of knowledge has for centuries fallen into disrepute. 315

Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, (Orbis, 1979).

A translation is tied to the historical setting in which the original events occurred. A translation, even a dynamically equivalent one, dare change the cultural setting of the original events. In most attempts to communicate the Word, however, the essential messages of God need to be “transculturalized” into the receptors’ [*hearers*] cultural setting. For today’s receptors, Jesus needs to walk their paths, eat in their homes. The receptors need to live and learn, as the original disciples did, in Jesus’ presence today. For this they need dynamic witnesses, living and speaking a dynamically equivalent message in terms of the receptors’ perceptual grids. 276

Like those who have received the full Spirit-guided impact of effective communication from God, we are transformed into those committed to the cause for which he gives himself... We are to continue the personal, interactional communication that God has carried out with and through his people through

the centuries. God undoubtedly can still communicate to humanity directly, as he apparently did with Adam, Abraham, Moses, and many others. But for some reason he chooses not too much of the time. Someone has said, “Without him *we can’t*, but without us *he won’t*.” He calls us to participate with him in his desire to cross communicational barriers to get his message across to humanity. As he once came as a human being, so he continues to reach human beings through human beings. We go with God in Jesus’ stead (2 Cor 5:20). His method is still incarnational... As ambassadors, heralds, and witnesses we are responsible persons, possessed of a degree of freedom and self-determination but linked inseparably to the source of our authority and that to which we testify – [the living God in three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit]. 276-277

**Obedience = *hypakoe*** [*hypakoe* is the noun; *hypakouo* the verb]

NOTE: This is a compound word: *hypar* = a preposition with various expressions, *about*, *concerning*, *over*, *more than*, *beyond*; and *akouo* = meaning *to hear*.

### Lexicon

A state of being in compliance, obedience (one listens and follows instructions)... predominantly of obedience to God and God’s commands. 1028

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The word hear embraces both physical hearing and the apprehension of something with the mind [“to take into custody; to grasp the meaning of; to understand]. Similarly, the Greek verb *akouo* and the noun *akoe*, as used in the New Testament, can have both meanings, though originally these words denoted only the former. Various compounds are used to denote apprehension with the mind... the emphatic forms *hypakouo* and *hypakoe* (literally *hear beneath*) mean to obey and obedience. The linguistic and conceptual relationship between *akouo* and *hypakouo* recurs in Old and Middle English in the use of the same word for both *hear* and *obey*. 172

The apostle Paul sought to bring every thought captive in obedience to Christ; Christ is the highest authority over human reason (2 Cor 10:5). The obedience we render to Christ is the obedience of faith. As an apostle to whom has been committed the preaching of the glad good news Paul made it his aim to establish this obedience among the nations (Rom 1:5; 16:26). He has this obedience in view in Rom 15:18 and 16:19. It includes submission to the apostle through whom Christ speaks (2 Cor 7:5; 13:3; 10:5 f. ; Phlm 15). It is obedience to the preaching which brings righteousness (Rom 6:16 f.), and to the truth (1 Pet 1:22). 1 Pet 1:2 and 14 also refer to this obedience: Christians are “children of obedience”, because this obedience must embrace their whole lives. 179