

“I Wanna” or “I Hafta”

As a young boy, I obeyed the rules that my parents set for us children, at least most of the time. I must confess that in the earlier years of my life that my obedience was based upon the motivation that “I hafta to do what mom and dad says.” There was a “rod of correction” awaiting those who dared to infringe on this set of rules. I did not enjoy being the recipient of this correction so I gave grudging obedience to my parents in order to avoid punishment. Thankfully, as the years passed and I began to mature and better understand my parents, their rules and their motivation, my attitude toward obedience gradually changed. My reason for following my parents’ rules underwent a metamorphosis from the viewpoint of “I hafta” to obey the rules to “I wanna do the things that please my parents.”

God gives us rules (commands) to follow as His children. People who are spiritually immature look at those commands and ask, “Do I hafta do that?” or “You mean I can’t do this?” When one has this disposition toward obedience to the Lord’s commands then the life of a disciple becomes a drudgery for this individual. God’s commandments become a weight that is chained to their spiritual ankle to be dragged along through life. The prohibitions contained in God’s word seem to keep this person from having a sense of freedom and fulfillment. Brethren with this perspective of the Christian walk often are the ones who conclude that “it just isn’t worth it,” throw away their faith, and return back into the world.

As I came to know and understand my parents better and their motivation for the rules that were set for us kids, my motivation for obedience was transformed from “I hafta” to “I wanna.” It was their obvious love and sacrifice for the three of us children and their desire for us to be happy, responsible individuals which finally brought about this conversion in my

heart. I no longer felt like obeying the rules was being forced upon me. My desire was now to follow these rules so that my parents would be pleased and honored through my obedience.

It is crucial that Christians grow in their spiritual understanding and perspective of God's laws for His children today. God's motive for giving man rules to live by is not to deprive him of the pleasures of life. Instead, His statutes are for our good. *"And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day"* (Deuteronomy 6:24).

As we grow in our understanding and love for God our rationale for obedience will change. Notice some things that Jesus had to say on this subject. *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him"* (John 14:23). The apostle John wrote, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3). Obedience to God's law is not a burden for the child of God who is seeking to please and honor their Father.

Consider the principle described by the psalmist, *"Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart"* (Psalms 37:4). This person actually derives pleasure from keeping His statutes because they delight in the Lord. When one loves God their priorities shift from that of self-gratification to attempting to gratify (please) the One who is worthy of our complete devotion.

Are you obeying God's commands? If so, are you doing so because "you hafta or because you wanna?"