



"The man who does not set himself under the law of God sets himself above it."

—John Blanchard

20-Jun-14

## *Christian Obedience*

It is commonly thought—if not commonly taught—that obedience plays little part in New Testament Christianity. People are urged, "Believe in [Jesus Christ](#), and you will be saved." They are told to love the Lord and have [faith](#). But obey? If the [law of God](#) has been done away, what need is there of obedience? If God's grace covers all [sin](#) and works avail us nothing, then what place does obedience fill? Did not Jesus remove lawkeeping from the salvation equation?

Many professing Christians reveal the deficiency of their theological knowledge by believing that such things are the end-all of Christianity. They have been hoodwinked by preachers who adhere to the "[once saved, always saved](#)" line of Protestant teaching, a false doctrine easily refuted (see, for example, [Matthew 7:16-20](#); [John 15:6](#); [Hebrews 6:4-8](#); [10:26-31](#); etc.). The lure of "easy grace" has filled the pews of many a church with people eager for life after death but unwilling to change their present lives by living according to the teachings of God's Word.

It is true that the word "obey" is found just a few times in the gospels and never in a command such as "obey the law" or "obey God's commandments." But that does not mean that Jesus does not command us to obey—He just uses other words. For instance, He tells the rich young ruler, "But if you want to enter into life [eternal life], keep the commandments" ([Matthew 19:17](#)). It does not get much clearer than that.

However, this instance is not the only time He says such a thing. In [Luke 11:28](#), He tells a crowd gathered to hear Him, "Blessed are those who hear the word of [God](#) and keep it!" In His final instructions to His disciples before His arrest, He appeals to their affection for Him, saying, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" ([John 14:15](#)), and a little later, He restates this, taking it beyond them to Christians of all times:

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. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. ([John 14:23-24](#))

Finally, in [John 15:10](#), Jesus reveals that we have to be just as diligent in obeying Him as He was in obeying His Father in heaven: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

From the mouth of our Savior Himself, obedience is plainly a very New Testament, very Christian, teaching.

In this handful of statements, He was quite pointed about what we must obey: the commandments, the word of God, His words (which are the Father's words), and His and His Father's commandments. Plus, He gives us incentive to do this! We should obey His teaching if we want to have eternal life, if we want to demonstrate our love for Christ, if we want to be blessed, if we want God and Christ to make their home with us by the [Holy Spirit](#), and if we want to have and abide in the love of the Father and the Son. That is some healthy motivation!

It is worth looking at these from the negative side, just to see how disastrous it is to refuse to obey God and His Word. Thus, if we do not obey Him and His commands, we will not enter into life, we will not be blessed, we will not show love toward Christ, we will not have the Father and Son living in us by the Spirit of God, and we will not have the love of God in us. For a Christian to lack these things is utterly devastating! In fact, it would mean that he is not really a Christian! (Consider, for instance, Paul's statement in [Romans 8:14](#), defining a true Christian.)

Even when people realize that they should obey God and His commands, they may still scratch their heads over *why* obedience is necessary to the salvation process. If we are saved by grace through faith—as [Ephesians 2:8](#) makes obvious—and not justified by works of lawkeeping ([Galatians 2:16](#)), what good do they do? Is not obedience to God's law useless or at the best, merely dutiful or ceremonial?

Those who ask these kinds of questions have a limited understanding of what God is doing with humanity. In essence, they believe that God's sole purpose is to "save" people from their sins, for that is what Christ's sacrifice accomplishes—the shedding of His precious blood pays the penalty for sin, redeeming us from eternal death, and with His righteousness covering our corruption, provides us access to a relationship with the Father (see [Romans 5:6-11](#)). This is a wonderful divine act of grace because we do not deserve such [merciful](#) treatment.

The truth is, however, that salvation does not end there. One of the apostle Paul's comments in Romans 5 hints broadly at this: "Much more, having been reconciled [to the Father], we shall be saved by His life" (verse 10). Christ's death does not save us, but His resurrection to eternal life does! Not only does it make possible our future resurrection to eternal life (see [I Corinthians 15:20-23](#)), but it also gives Him the opportunity to work with those whom God calls to bring them to spiritual maturity. Notice how Paul describes Christ's ongoing work with the church:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#))

As Head of the church ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#); [Colossians 1:18](#)), Christ now works to bring us "to a perfect man," that is, He is completing a spiritual process to fashion us in His own image. Paul calls this "the new man" in [Ephesians 4:22-24](#): "Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." Theologically, this process is called "sanctification."

This is where our obedience comes into play. Paul writes in [Hebrews 5:9](#), "Having been perfected, [Christ] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Keeping God's commandments—His instructions—will guide us in learning what God requires of us and in impressing His character image upon us. God's laws do not save us, but they provide a pattern of behavior that pleases Him because such behavior is a reflection of His own. Obedience, then, becomes a tool that we use in conjunction with Christ to grow in righteousness and prepare for the Kingdom of God.

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Paul: Grace, Law, and Obedience](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh focuses upon Paul's impressive credentials and pedigree, which Paul considered rubbish, compared to his conversion and God's dramatic intervention in his life. Paul's writings, because of their complexity, have become the target of unscrupulous, antinomian twisting and equivocating by the carnal mind with its natural anti-law bias. By denigrating God's law, the unconverted presumptuously set their own standards. God's holy and righteous law was never designed to justify but only to identify sin and align one with the right standards—guiding one along the path to God's righteous purpose. Everyone who is saved will be a keeper of God's law. Paul used his life to illustrate our indebtedness to God and to caution about the law's limitation (or misapplied function) to justify, a function met only by Christ's sacrifice.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Is Obedience Required Before Receiving God's Holy Spirit?](#)

by Earl L. Henn (1934-1997)

Acts 5:32 says very clearly that God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him, yet some argue that keeping God's law is not necessary. What is the truth? Earl Henn clarifies this contentious point.

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