

Why We Obey

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It is the very nature of Christian salvation that man cannot save himself. He has broken God's law and falls short of the glory of God and as we have seen in the past few weeks, Christ has done something about that. The law of God which condemns us is a law that Christ has come and fulfilled: fulfilled in his teaching, fulfilled in his obedience, fulfilled in his death, fulfilled in so many ways and Christ is the one who answers the demands of a rigid law against us. He met its righteous requirements and has paid the law's penalty for sin on behalf of those who would believe in him. This is basic to Christian salvation. It is basic to what we have been exploring over the past few weeks from the book of Matthew. And through faith in Christ, that righteousness of his is imputed to us. It is counted toward us. It is reckoned toward us. It is given to us as a gift from God so that we would be declared righteous before him; that no longer would the law accuse us of its violations because its penalty has been paid and answered in full by the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. That is a wonderful and blessed thing. God accepts men only through faith in Christ, not on the basis of their deeds. But as we contemplate that, as we set the stage for that here this morning and as we will celebrate that in communion next week, there is something important for us to realize, something that is very crucial to understand about our now present relationship to the law as believers.

It's important to understand that the moral law reflected in the Old Testament as particularly in the 10 Commandments, is still a reflection of God's moral character that has not changed, that has not been violated, that has not been set aside. It's important to realize that when God saved you, he saved you in order to make you holy. He didn't save you because you were holy. No, the whole premise of salvation is that you sin and fall short of the glory of God but God saved you in order, in part, to begin a process of sanctification that would increasingly conform you to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ and that image would one day be perfected when he brings you into heaven into his glory. So there is a goal in salvation that far transcends simply keeping you out of the flames of hell. Christ has done that for us and we are very grateful for it, but there is a goal that God has in order to make us into a people that is like his Son, and the way that his Son is and the morality which reflects something of the moral character of God, is found in the moral character of the law. And Jesus said in the passage that we've been studying, that there is still a role that the law plays in the life of the disciple even though it is not the way that we can come justified; even though the law no longer condemns us, there is still a role for that law to play in our lives.

I want you to look at Matthew 5 with me again. Matthew 5:18, we'll start in verse 17 which is now becoming very familiar to us, isn't it? Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but," and this is where we are focusing for this morning, "whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Beloved, what's going on here this morning is this: I want to do my best as I open God's word for you here today so that the reward of which Christ speaks, that those who keep and teach the law of God would be called great in the kingdom of heaven. I want to lay before you that which would put you in a position to receive the greatness of that reward of which Christ speaks. He's very clear that there will be degrees of reward in heaven. He says there will be some who will be considered the least who had a flippant or careless view of God's word and lived accordingly, and he says that there are those who will be considered great in the kingdom, spoken of by God as great in his kingdom, and those will be the ones who were careful with his law, who honored it, who respected it, and who sought to live out its righteousness even though they knew it could not justify them. As we rest alone in Christ for our justification before God, we realize that he gave us a word that has abiding authority. Christ said himself that the smallest letter or stroke wouldn't pass away from the law until all is accomplished. So we recognize that there is an abiding authority and we honor the one who saved us by honoring the word which spoke to him and the one in which he himself affirmed.

So I want to help you walk through those things in your mind here this morning. This is foundational for all of life. The moral law of God still has authority in our Christian lives even though obedience is not the grounds on which God accepts us. God accepts us based on the work and shed blood of Jesus Christ alone and it's through faith in him that he declares us righteous. That is the basis on which God accepts us. He accepts us for the sake of his Son. Period. Full stop. Having said that, God when he saved us, also gave us a new nature, changed us from the inside out with a heart that is now intended to be responsive to his word, to be obedient to it, to love it and to respond to it not with a sense of fearsome drudgery, but rather with a glad heart that loves this expression of God's righteousness and seeks to fulfill it in our own lives.

What does the moral law do for us as believers? It teaches us what the will of God is. It directs us in the path that we should walk in life. It teaches us what it is that pleases God. It helps us to see the remaining pollution in our nature when we violate it. It speaks out and says to those motives and to those words and to those actions, "That is not pleasing to God," and it awakens in us a sense that we need to come back to Christ and to be conformed more closely to his image. Respect for his moral law restrains us from sin and ultimately it promotes our blessing from God. None of those things are the basis on which God accepts us but it is the place where our Christian lives flourish. It is what God

has intended us to do, to be a reflection in our lives of the moral character which is embodied in his law.

So that's why we look to the moral law of God and Scripture says, indeed, that our Christian lives are in part a fulfillment of the law. Look at Romans 8 with me. This is all by way of introduction. Romans 8, beginning in verse 1, where the Apostle Paul after explaining the fullness of justification and sanctification in the prior chapter says now in chapter 8, verse 1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Even as we sin and fall short of the glory of God in our Christian lives, there is no condemnation of us. God does not condemn us when we sin and fall short of the glory of God in our Christian lives. Why is that? It's because the curse has already been paid. The condemnation has already been borne by our Lord Jesus Christ. He drank the cup of wrath to the full. He drank it to the dregs. He drank it to the utter and bittermost last drop. So the penalty has been paid and God is satisfied with the payment that Christ made, therefore there is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus, and that is a great breath of relief. We heave a sigh of relief. "Thank God that the demands of the law have been satisfied on my behalf and I no longer fear condemnation from God because of the way that I now fall short." We rest in that. We find our peace in that. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet as we read on, we realize that from that position of strength, from that position of forgiveness, from that position of a declared righteousness, God beckons us to fulfill the moral aspects of his law with the way that we now live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 2 with me, he says, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." You are no longer in fear that God will condemn you to eternal death because Christ has paid the price for that.

Verse 3, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh," you could never keep the law in your own power, "God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh." What's the purpose of all of that? Here's where we connect with our time for this morning, "so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." That as we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit in response to the salvation that has been given to us, we find ourselves spontaneously, naturally through the power of the changed life that God has given us, reflecting something of the moral character of his law in the way that we live. So we see that we honor the righteousness of the law as the Spirit works within us.

Here's the point, beloved, as Christians: that Spirit-empowered obedience which flows from a fully reconciled position with God is an inevitable response for every true believer to the enduring moral demands of God's law. God saved us so that our lives would reflect his holiness. God saved us so that we would be transformed and his Spirit works that transformation in our lives.

J. C. Ryle, the nineteenth century commentator, guides our thinking about the moral law with these words. He says, "Let us not to suppose for a moment that it is set aside by the

Gospel or that Christians have nothing to do with it. Christ refers his people to it as their guide for holy living. It cannot save us but never let us despise it." In other words, we realize that obedience to this law does not save us because our actions are not fit for God even as believers. We realize that Christ has accomplished that on our behalf. At the same time, we don't despise it with the sense that therefore we can sin against it and live in total disregard to the morality that is reflected in God's law because, after all, grace covers it all. That is an unbiblical view and an unbiblical response to what God has done in salvation. God saved you – watch it, this is the whole point – God saved you to make you holy.

God saved you in order that he would own your life and transform you and that is what we're going to flesh out in our message here this morning. We're going to flesh it out by examining six reasons that moral obedience is the necessary mark of a true Christian. Six reasons or you could say six motivations that would incline your heart toward obedience to God. And let me say this: I realize that when I preach, usually I'm saying two or three points and that goes for a good hour most days and you might say, "Where is six going to go? How long will we be here today with six? I can do the math in my head on that." Well, before you get too concerned about that, let me say this that maybe will help you view me with a sense of even greater sympathy than perhaps you were otherwise inclined to do this morning: the original draft of this message had 14 reasons and I have, in an act of love toward you, I have graciously reduced it to six with what we have in front of us here this morning.

These six motives incline your heart toward obedience. They incline your heart toward – watch this – toward a loving submission toward God; a grateful response to him that comes not from fear of punishment if you disobey, no, we're resting in the fact that there is no condemnation for us, rather these things incline us toward a loving response to our holy God. They change our whole perspective. It's not a weight that we bear that says, "I must do this or I will be damned." We say, "We do this, we respond this way to God because we love him, because we recognize who he is. We want to please him with our lives in a grateful response to the fullness of the salvation that has been showered upon us in such immeasurable mercy on our souls."

So it's from that perspective that we see these things and, beloved, based on the authority of God's word, based on what Christ himself said in that passage in Matthew 5, what we're talking about here echoes and rebounds and redounds throughout all of eternity. There are matters of great eternal significance with what we are saying here this morning and your response to them, you're willing embrace of these things, will expand the measure of the reward that God gives to you in heaven and the measure of the blessing that you experience in this life as you embrace these things. So all of these things that we are about to hear today are true and guide us in the direction of obedience and we realize that God blesses us when we obey him, right? And what these things do is, if God has given us, as he has, Scripture says, he took out the heart of stone and gave us a heart of flesh, rather than something that was hard and rocky now we have something that is tender and warm and responsive to his word; well, if that's what he's given us, he has given us a heart of flesh like that, then what we are about to see is kind of like the

tenderizer that's put on the meat in order to make it even more responsive, more tender, more soft. These are the things that a believing heart hears and responds to and it inclines them all the more to be under the authority and in loving submission to his God. That is what we are to be as Christians and let's see what it is that motivates us in that direction.

Each point we're going to treat very simply, very quickly, but collectively they give us a disposition of mind that says, "No matter my weakness, no matter how I stumble, I embrace for all of these reasons a desire to live my life to the glory of God and to honor him with my life and my obedience."

Point 1 then, why is it that we obey? That's the title of the message here today if you're looking for it later, "Why We Obey." Point 1: we obey because God is holy. God is holy. God is high and lofty and separate from his creation. He is over all. He is separate from us. He is someone high and exalted. That's part of what it means that he is holy, but God is also holy in the sense that there is no moral defect in him. His character, his essence, is perfectly righteous. There is nothing untoward or evil or anything of any moral defect in God. He is holy and blameless in all. And what Scripture does as it speaks to us about our Christian lives is, it calls you and me to live a holy life based on that aspect of God's character. Because God is like that and because now you have been saved by him and you are in his family, therefore you should live as a child of God and seek to reflect something of the nature of the Father who appointed your salvation. It's very natural, very obvious.

Look over at 1 Peter 1. We're going to look at a number of different passages here today all designed to promote your eternal blessedness in the way that God would reward you for your Christian life. At the end of the day you remember, right, that Christ said to those to whom he says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." Beloved, my brothers and sisters in Christ, my friends and visitors with us, nothing should be more important in your life. There is no higher aspiration that you could have to shape and direct the course of your life than saying, "There is one thing that I want out of life and it is this, that when I step into glory I would hear those words from my Savior. That he would look at me and say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Welcome. You are where you belong. Enter into the joy of your Master.'" If that pronouncement is given to you by Christ at the culmination of your existence, then nothing else matters by comparison. The sweet affirmation of Christ is the highest motivation that we could have in life and that's what we want for you. That's what we present to you, that this is the direction in which that reward becomes yours.

And in 1 Peter 1:14, we could look at so many things but I really reduced it to one or two passages for each of these points. Well, let's go to verse 3, Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Peter in that section is describing salvation as an accomplished fact and he points us, as I just did, to the inheritance, to the

reward that awaits us in heaven, and so that having been born again, our eyes are fixed on that reward yet to come. From that perspective and because those things are true, he says in verse 13, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." You see, there is this future focus that defines the way that you think about life. "I'm not living for this world. I'm not living for the approval of men. I'm not living for the accumulation of riches," you say to yourself. "I realize that people are going to come and go in my life. I recognize all of that and that's why living for the reward that certainly comes from Christ is the defining aspiration of my existence," you say to yourself. "I'm fixing my hope completely on that, realizing that things come and go in this life."

Well, then what? Verse 14, "As obedient children." Do you see the obedience? As obedient children, we are saying why we obey and Peter says, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Your pursuit of holiness in your life is ultimately grounded on a vertical reality. It is grounded in the reality that God himself is holy and God is the one who saved you, and in response to that, you realize that the only right way for me to respond to a salvation from a holy God is to pursue holiness in my own life. Not simply to pursue the passions of this life, not simply to pursue the prosperity of this life, but that there is a greater overarching purpose in your life and that is to recognize and honor God for his holiness in part through the holy way that you respond to his word in your life. Why do you obey? It's because God is holy. God is the one who saved you and therefore you live in a manner that is in accordance with the holiness that he has revealed in his word.

We don't take time at this point to detail specific principles, we are talking about the broadest general sense which frames the thinking of our thoughts about everything else and so it is clear based on what Peter said, that salvation, true salvation does not mean that we now set aside obedience as something that is irrelevant to our lives and that Jesus paid it all and therefore I have no concerns and I can live any way that I want, and whether I sin or obey is a matter of indifference to God. No. That's not true. God says, "You be holy as my people because I myself am holy." And out of respect and reverence for who he is, out of love for the fact that he saved us, our heart response, the tenderized flesh in our hearts says, "Yes, Lord, of course. That's what I want too. Please help me to that end." You obey because God is holy.

Secondly, what else can we say about this as we continue on? Secondly, we can say this: God planned for your obedience. God planned for your obedience. I love this point. I love all of what God's word has to say about this, of course, but to recognize that God had a plan from before the beginning of time in order that you would live it out in your life and he saved you so that you would further the plan that he had for you in saving you, and part of his plan for you is that you would live a life of obedience to him.

Now, keeping your finger in the back part of your Bible, let me turn you back to Matthew 5 for just a moment. Why do we obey? It's because God planned for your obedience and

when God saved you, beloved, he changed your heart. He changed your inner nature. He gave you a brand-new disposition toward the things of his word so that you went from loving sin and hating Christ, you went from pursuing the world and indifference to God's word, you went from darkness to light, from under the dominion of Satan to the dominion of Christ; there was such a radical change and part of that change was that God changed you so that your heart would no longer love sin but love righteousness.

Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, he said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they," and they alone, "will be satisfied." It is the mark of a true Christian that they desire in the depths of their innermost being with a spiritual thirst and a spiritual hunger, "Oh, I want my life to approximate the righteousness of God as much as it possibly can. I desire that. That's what I want." That's what God produces in the lives of those who are truly saved. Well, here is a blessed fact for you to remember as you are recognizing those desires as Scripture brings to light and brings to your understanding what the nature of true salvation is, your heart responds to that and says, "Ah, yes, this is defining why I live. This is the point of my existence." And your heart runs to that and welcomes it and embraces it because it is consistent with everything that God saved you to be.

Now, let me show you that the Bible says that God planned for your obedience ahead of time. Even before you were saved, God planned for your obedience. Look at the book of Ephesians now. That's why I had you keep your finger in the back of your Bible. Ephesians 2. We are very familiar with verses 8 and 9 which say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." This is what we started out saying. We are saved by grace through faith. It's not as a result of our works. We can't possibly boast about our salvation because it was a gift from God from beginning to end. Sometimes people don't go on and read verse 10 which says this, look at it with me, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." You were saved in order that your life might produce the good works that are reflected in Scripture. And what does it say about those good works? It says, "which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." God determined beforehand when you would be born, when you would be saved. Some of you saved later in life can take great comfort in that. You were saved at precisely the right time because you were saved in accordance with the plan of God which he had determined before time began. Now having been saved, recognize that God didn't save you and then just step back and leave you to yourself to kind of meander around and maybe find his purpose and maybe not. God didn't save you so that maybe you would be obedient and maybe you would not. God saved you with an entire plan in place, not just for the moment in which you were converted but for everything that would flow from that moment on until you entered into glory or until Christ returns.

So God had a plan and has a plan in place and the nature of the life that he gives you is what he has prepared for you in order to live out the good works that he calls you to, and God prepared the nature of those things in advance. God determined in advance, prepared in advance the circumstances of your life. He prepared in advance the relationships that would define your life, whether for ease or for difficulty. And in these things, God has set

into motion the plan and says, "I've prepared it before you." Now as you walk step-by-step and see it unfolding, the opportunity for good works that you have there is what God had prepared for you to do all along. So all of a sudden you realize that you are pursuing obedience and one of the reasons that you obey is that God had planned this ahead of time and has put you in a position to succeed in your obedience with the life that he has given to you.

Look over at Titus 2 with me, just a little bit further to the right in your Bibles. If you get to the book of Hebrews, you've gone too far. In Titus 2 it says in verse 11 that, "the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." That's not a statement of universalism. Verse 12 he says, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking," here it is again, what we've been talking about, looking for the finishing line, looking to hit the tape running, so to speak, looking "for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." We say there is a coming day when Christ will fully redeem us, when we will see him. Then in verse 14 it says that he "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to," here's the purpose, "and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Christ gave himself for us in order to save us and to redeem us from our lawless deeds. And as he gave himself on the cross, there was a forward dimension to the outworking of the consequences of his crucifixion, and the outworking of the future consequences of that, there would be a people that would become his as the Spirit brought men one by one to saving faith in Christ. And the purpose of that ever-growing body of people during the course of their existence is that they would be zealous for good deeds; that they would be mindful and motivated by a desire to glorify their Savior with the righteous way that they lived in response to his word and in response to his salvation that he has given us. This is what salvation is. This is what salvation does. There is no other kind of salvation that is real and genuine. So a desire to obey marks out the redeemed because we know that God has planned for our obedience ahead of time.

Sinclair Ferguson says this, he says and I quote, "The law is not the basis on which we merit salvation but it does provide a test to distinguish between those who belong to the kingdom of salvation and those who are outside of it. It is the real test of whether we have been born again or not. If we have been, then God's law has been written in our hearts and we obey it joyfully." Not out of fear, not out of a sense of resentment, "Oh, God says this and therefore I have to do it." No. No. "God says this and therefore I get to do it. I get to live this way. I have been freed from the dominion of sin. I've been freed from that prior anger that dominated my heart. I've been freed from the lust that used to dominate me. I've been freed from greed and now I am able to pursue a life that is pleasing to God in the power of the Spirit. And I embrace that. I am joyful over that. That's what I want," the true Christian says. "It's what God prepared for me. It's what he saved me for. This was his plan all along, that I would be like that." And as you understand the divine perspective on this, the holiness of God and the plan of God, you say, "Okay, I'm going to get in step with the Spirit of God then. I'm going to get in step with God's plan and I'm going to orient my heart toward a submissive loving response to what his word says." That's true salvation. There is no other kind.

Can you imagine how foolish it is, how foolish it sounds, how foolish it would be if God would save a people and then be content to let them live a life that was in total disregard of his own character? What earthly father that has any sense of care for his children wants his children to live in utter rebellion to everything that he stands for? None of you who are Christian parents would want that for you children. Some of you are grieving over the fact that that's exactly what has happened in the lives of your own children and it's your greatest grief in life. I get that. That should just help you to see that when God saved us, it was with the intention that we would be a reflection of the character of the one who saved us and that motivates our heart to obey.

Thirdly, we'll just touch on this very very briefly: obedience deepens your assurance. Obedience deepens your assurance. Your own experience teaches you this. Isn't it true that when you drift into patterns of sin, that you have a sense of losing the joy of your salvation? David spoke of that in Psalm 51, didn't he? Isn't it true in times past perhaps when you were less familiar with the doctrines of salvation, you were saved but you were still not more deeply into God's word, isn't it true that when you would sin you would wonder, "Am I really saved or not?" And sin has a way of imposing and injecting those kinds of doubts into your mind because you have a natural sense that this is incongruous with the way that a saved person should live.

Well, Scripture speaks to that and it says you can either increase your assurance with obedience or diminish it by sin. 1 John 2:3, I'll just quote it to you. It says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments." James 2:18 says, "someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" The nature of your life is manifesting what is real about your faith. It is giving testimony to those around you about whether what you say is really true inside or not. So obedience deepens your assurance. As you live out life and you see a developing pattern that is imperfect, we understand that but I have to qualify it so that I am never misrepresented hopefully in what I say: we understand that the obedience is imperfect but Scripture is speaking of a direction of heart that loves obedience, that seeks it and does not tolerate known sin and disobedience for a prolonged period of time in your life. And as you deal with sin that way, as you confess and turn from it as a believer and you see this as a developing pattern of your life, you say, "Ah, that's the mark of a true believer. That's what's going on in my heart. This shows that I belong to him." Obedience deepens your assurance.

Fourthly, this one is precious. Fourthly, why do we obey? We obey because we love Christ. We obey because we love Christ. Why is it that people in times past were willing to shed their blood for the sake of the testimony of Christ? Why was it when given opportunity, those martyrs refused to recant their trust of the naming of Christ when given opportunity? When the noose was around their neck said, "Will you recant?" and they say, "No," and the trapdoor opens and they go to their eternal reward? Why was it that they wouldn't do that? Why wouldn't they recant? It's because Christ is precious to us. It's because we understand something of the divine love that motivated him to leave heaven in order to save us. We recognize that he had an undeserved mercy upon us. We

realize that we have been the recipients of grace that came at great cost to Christ; that he suffered in his earthly life though he was without sin; that he suffered on the cross, not just the physical torments but that he undertook the eternal punishment. He felt the pains of eternal judgment for everyone who would ever believe in him. The eternal damnation that you deserved, Christ absorbed it in those hours on the cross and we look at that and we step back and we bow our head before him and say, "Lord, thank you. That's sweet. That's precious. You did that for me. And Scripture says it was an act of love that you had for us in addition to being in obedience to your Father, but that you loved us and gave yourself up for us." Paul said, "He loved me and gave himself up for me." Well, beloved, you're not saved if you don't somehow understand that that's a heart response to the saving work of Christ and that it's not a matter of incidental indifference, "I can take that or leave that. Jesus died for sinners, great. Yeah, now what's for supper? What's on TV?" No, this is a showstopper in your soul and you love him for it. That divine love when it has been shed abroad in your heart, calls forth a response of like love.

So we obey from a love for Christ. Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me you will," what? "Keep My commandments." He said in John 15:14, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." You see, the real proof of your love for Christ is not sentimental feelings that come and go. It's not that music has whipped you up into an emotional response and, "I feel really good now. I feel really warm thoughts toward Jesus, and that that's the mark and that shows that I truly belong to him and that I love him by what I feel inside." All of the chief entertainment that marks so much of so-called evangelical Christianity today designed to make you laugh, designed to make you feel good, designed to manipulate your emotions through the rise and fall of the lights and the rise and fall of the music volume, it's all a tawdry substitute for what the reality is. The reality of your love for Christ is not found in the way that you feel at any given moment. The reality of Christ, by his own words, is shown by obedience to him and his word, and sometimes that doesn't feel good. Sometimes that is difficult. Sometimes that brings conflict into your life but you do it and say, "There is no other place to go. This is what obedience calls for. This is what duty requires. This is what loyalty to Christ requires and I love him and therefore I do it regardless of how I feel at any given moment."

Now as you live a life of that kind of pattern, the truer depth of a sense of emotional satisfaction in Christ is surely there. It's not divorced from those feelings but the feelings are secondary to the heart of obedience. And no one should think that the fact that they have good feelings at the name of Jesus is a substitute for obedience to him. Those who live in open unbroken sin should not think anything about being fully reconciled to God no matter how good they feel about it. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." We show our love through our obedience to him.

And beloved, I'll just say it one more time: we don't do this with reluctance, do we? This isn't a force of external compulsion that is contrary to our desires. Of course we love him in response to the fact that he saved us. And of course that love motivates us to obey because we want to please him. Don't you young children in the audience, those of you that are 10, 9, 8, 6, 4, you know that one of the ways that you can make your parents happy is when you do what they tell you to do? "I want to make daddy happy, I'll obey

him then." Well, that fundamental principle that love is expressed in obedience as we mature in Christ just becomes more and more the motivating factor of what we want to do. We obey Christ because we love him and we show our love through our obedience, not apart from it. That's point 4.

What have we said? Why do we obey? We've said that we obey because God is holy, because God planned for your obedience, because obedience deepens your assurance, because we obey out of love for Christ. Fifthly, closely related to number 4: we obey to serve Christ. We obey to serve Christ. Here is something fundamental and basic. I like the fundamentals. I like the basics. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is Master of the universe. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. All authority dwells in him. And for those of us who come to him, we come to him on a basis of faith that says, "If we confess with our mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved, for with the mouth and confesses resulting in salvation." Fundamental to the Christian position is the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is boss. He rules. He is the one to obey. Well, we serve our Lord in part through our obedience to him.

You can write this reference down or memorize it to look at it later, I guess. I can't compel you to pick up a pen and take notes and I don't even try. Some people listen and learn that way. Luke 6:46, Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" "What's with this profession of your mouth that does not result in a possession in life? What's with that? Do you not see," he would say to this one proclaiming Christ and yet living in open disobedience to him, "do you not see that what you say with your mouth is inconsistent with your life and the Lord is examining your life more than he is the testimony of your lips?" If the testimony of your lips is real, it will be reflected in your life. This is how we serve Christ, it is by obeying him.

Look over at 2 Timothy. If you're still in Titus, just go back one book to your left to 2 Timothy 2. We're almost to the end here. 2 Timothy 2, beginning in verse 19, building on this confession of Christ as Lord. Verse 19, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.' Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work." If you name the name of Christ then there is a fundamental commitment in your heart that says, "I will abstain from wickedness," and in so doing you will become a vessel that is prepared for service to the Master. This is the point of salvation.

Finally, number 6, and it's so simple and we trust God for what he says in this part. In point 6 we say: God blesses obedience. God blesses obedience. God honors our obedience by blessing us now and blessing us in eternity.

Go back to Matthew 5 with me, if you would. Matthew 5 as we come full circle. And as you're turning there, let me just kind of remind you and just kind of walk through in the

most general sense the big picture sense of what we're talking about here. We've looked at this from the perspective of theology proper, you could say. We've looked at the character of God: he is holy, that brings our obedience. We've looked at this from the perspective of the plan of God and that motivates us toward obedience. We've looked at it from inside our own hearts realizing that obedience promotes our assurance and that we love Christ and therefore we obey him, and we serve Christ with our obedience. So we've looked up at God, we've looked inside and found how our heart responds to these things and now, as it were, we look around and say, "What does God do with that obedience that we offer to him with the imperfect yet sincere obedience that we render to him in response to his word?" We find that God blesses it; that God in his loyal love and his kindness toward us, honors that obedience.

Look at Matthew 5:19 where we come again that, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven," here's our focus for today, "but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Called great by God. God, seeing a life that honored his word says, "That's what I was looking for. Enter into the joy of your Master. I bless you with the higher honor that goes to those who honored my word." Whatever that means, Jesus doesn't get into detail here about what that looks like but, beloved, I think that we know God well enough in his grace and his mercy and in his superabundant kindness toward us that he has already shown us, that whatever his dispensing of greatness looks like, whatever his concept of honor for that obedience becomes for us, it's going to be far greater than anything that we deserve. We're going to experience personally in this that he who believes in him is never disappointed. What you're going to find, beloved, is that your faithful Christian life pockmarked with some failure, we get that, pockmarked with a lot of sorrow along the way, that when it's all said and done as you've lived out your life and that heart desiring to obey God in the way that we have talked about here today, defined that God somehow in a way that I won't presume to describe here this morning but somehow there is going to be an abundance of blessing that is dispensed upon you, that is dumped on you, sometimes in this life, certainly in eternity, and you are going to find that God has blessed your obedience in a measure that redounds to your eternal benefit in a way that was geometrically disproportionate to the effort that you put into it because God will bless that tender heart of obedience even in its imperfection. God will bless that and honor those because God gives honor to those who give honor to him. That's worth living for, isn't it?

Let me give you one final passage to round this out. 2 Corinthians 5:10. Throughout these passages that we've looked at, there has been this theme of looking forward to the inheritance, looking forward to what lies beyond this life, being mindful of future eternal realities and that gives a fuel to the fire of obedience. And in 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul says, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." He says, "My preference is to be in heaven with Christ although I can deal with this for a time." But he says in verse 9 – look at this, beloved, look at it as we see Scripture again and again reinforcing what it says in so many places. This is the heart of it all. Everything that we've talked about in these six points leading up to this grand climax of a settled desire in your heart in your Christian life. Verse 9, "Therefore

we also have as our ambition," this is our defining motivation to life, "whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." Verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Paul is speaking of the reality that believers will one day stand before Christ and receive a reward for their lives. Some will find that they have squandered their lives and given little consideration to Christ as they should have even as believers and their reward is not as great as it could have been. They have forfeited opportunity. Not that they will be condemned and sent to hell, that's not the point. It's implied in this is that those who have devoted their lives to Christ will find that Christ graciously greets them and rewards them abundantly for that brief window of time in which he gave us to serve him according to which he had previously prepared beforehand for us.

So we are all moving toward this time when we will receive our reward from Christ. And why do we obey? We find it in what God's word has shown us here today. It motivates us. It is sweet to us. It is what we desire. It's what we delight to give ourselves over to in grateful response to a salvation that we did not deserve. And even in all of that that we've said, we find God going further and being even more gracious to us in what we have seen because he himself works in us through his Holy Spirit to help us in the task. We are not left to our own resources to carry this out.

Look for our closing text at Philippians 2. Man, this hour goes fast! Philippians 2. This is all over the place. Verse 10, "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The time is coming when we will bow before Christ and honor him with our mouth in his presence that he is Lord. "So then," verse 12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed," do you see the point of obedience being brought out again? "Not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence," what do you do with all of this? What do you do with these six principles of which we've spoken here this morning? What do you do in light of your coming appointment with Christ? You, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." He said, "I need to apply myself to this because there are great eternal consequences to the way I live my life as a Christian." Then he goes on to say and gives us the assurance and the encouragement. You are concerned about these things. These motivations appeal to you because, verse 13, "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Even as we apply ourselves to these things, we find that God is in the midst of our heart and orchestrating our circumstances in a way that helps us, that takes us beyond our natural ability, that gives us the motivation and the ability to do the very thing that he has commanded us to do. As we seek it, we can know that God is already working in our heart to make our obedience effective and pleasing to him.

What a great God! What a great salvation! That when we were undeserving, he saved us. Now having saved us, he gives us all of these reasons that should mold our heart to compliance to him. And in the midst of all of that, we find that he super-abundantly goes beyond and continues to work in our heart to make sure that he will perfect that for which

he saved us; that he will fully accomplish that which he has begun in our hearts. What a blessed God! That's why we obey him.

And in verse 14 it starts, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."

Beloved, in light of everything that we've said here today, won't you make your personal individual commitment of response to renew your sense of devotion to Christ? To render to him a glad and compliant heart that lives in submission to him and in unity with one another because that's what pleases him? Won't you do that? Ah, as you set your life to that goal, beloved, good things await.

Let's pray.

Father, give us grace that we might aim ourselves at that obedience that marks the redeemed, and may it spill over in our lives with one another in a spirit of unity of love and joy and shared devotion to Christ that has always made life with God's people so sweet for us in this church. We lift these things before you, our God, and commit ourselves to the obedient response that you call for, that you deserve and which you will most certainly bless. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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