

# Putting Obedience in Its Place

*Breaking the Bonds of Legalism*

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We're delighted again to open God's word for its instruction for our souls. We started a series over the past week or two that we've titled "Breaking the Bonds of Legalism" and we want to advance that series over the next three or four weeks. We said that there were two kinds of legalism and these things are of great practical import for our Christian lives and even great practical import for understanding the true nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is that kind of legalism that makes obedience to God somehow the means by which we are saved, we looked at this last week just by way of reminder, but Scripture makes it plain that we are not saved by the works of the law. There is no man who can obey God enough in order to merit salvation. We are all lost and ruined sinners. We are all bound to Satan apart from Christ and, therefore, there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. We need to be saved by someone outside of us and that only comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. We looked at that.

There is a second legalism that we discussed last time that elevates man-made rules that are not found in Scripture. This is a very critical point. When we talk about obedience to God, beloved, speaking as Christians, the only true obedience to God is to those principles that are revealed directly in Scripture. It is not obedience to God, it is not a good work to obey man-made rules that are not found in God's revelation. There may be practical health benefits or something like that but when we talk about the good works that Scripture describes, we are talking about those things that are found and premised on the revelation of Scripture. This second kind of legalism goes beyond God's word and elevates man-made rules that are not in the Bible. They will fuss, legalists will fuss over peripheral matters about dancing or women wearing pants or drinking or smoking or movies or things like that, and elevate that to a central standard by which a person's godliness is measured. This is a bad kind of legalism and the common thread to both types of those legalisms is this: is that it is an effort to relate to God based on man-centered rules rather than on Christ-centered faith; rather than looking at Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ the Shepherd of his people, and relating to him in faith and submission and trust, legalism exchanges the glory of Christ for man-made rules that have no power to save, that have no power to sanctify, and Scripture speaks directly to these matters and warns us against letting man-made rules run our lives, against letting man-made rules become the measure of our sanctification.

Look at Colossians 2 with me. Colossians 2, the Apostle Paul says, Colossians 2:20,

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Men make up these rules and then seek to bind the consciences of those who follow them or bind their own consciences to obedience to these man-made rules as if this somehow would improve their standing with God. Scripture condemns that. Verse 23,

23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Notice the terms in there in verse 23: self-made religion, self-abasement, man-centered rules that are not grounded in the revelation of God. Scripture says that we must worship God in spirit and in truth, we must worship him according to the revelation that he has given to us in Scripture in Christ, and that is the only method of acceptable worship to him. To ignore his word, to close his word, to set it aside and make up our own standards in the name of being righteous is not godly, it is sinful because God has revealed the manner in which he is to be approached, the manner in which he is to be obeyed, and we are to give our minds and our hearts over to his revelation rather than trying to make up our own approach to him. This is all very very critical.

In Matthew 15, if you would turn there, Jesus makes this same point as he dealt with the Pharisees. In Matthew 15, the Pharisees had chastised the disciples of Jesus because they weren't honoring the tradition of the elders, they weren't washing their hands when they ate bread. There was nothing in the Bible that spoke about that. There was nothing in the Bible that commanded that. As a matter of hygiene, is it a good idea to wash her hands? Sure. Is that a matter of worship before God by which you must bind the consciences of men? No, absolutely not. And Jesus asks them in verse 3,

3 ... He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Notice the distinction that he makes: there is what God has commanded and there is the tradition of men. Do not confuse the two, he says. He goes on and he speaks in verse 4,

4 "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death' 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God," 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Here's what he's saying, "You want to make a point about washing hands before meals and you accuse my disciples of violating tradition and therefore being in sin against God because they haven't followed your tradition. Well, what about the actual word of God that talks about honoring your father and mother? What about that? And you will not give what you have to help your parents in the name of saying, 'Oh, I've already given this away to God.'" He said, "You invalidate the word of God, you violate the word of God for the sake of your tradition and yet you take your tradition, elevate it over the word of God and judge others by it." He said, "You have it all wrong," and he condemns them in verse 7 when he says,

7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. 9 But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."

Notice what he says: their worship is in vain; it's empty; it's of no use; it's of no account. Even though they carry the outward appearance of righteousness, even though they bind the consciences of men with their traditions, Jesus says it's all in vain. He swept away in this condemnation those who were regarded at the time as the most holy people in the country on this principle of legalism.

Now, beloved, let me just say something here that kind of frames where we're going now today and in the days to come. It is very easy to be misunderstood when teaching on legalism, it's very easy to misunderstand the biblical teaching on legalism, and so I want to take some time today to kind of put obedience in its place. If you wanted a title for today's message, "Putting Obedience in Its Place," to have a biblical perspective on obedience as it relates to the Christian life, and here's what I want to say, I guess, to start: to teach against legalism is not to minimize the role of obedience in the Christian life, it's simply an effort to put obedience in its proper place. It's an effort to give us the right perspective on obedience so that our obedient lives would be done with the correct motivation in a way that enhances our liberty in Christ rather than confining us to false standards that God never laid upon us in the beginning to do anything with. So to teach against legalism is not to minimize obedience, it is simply an effort to put it in its place so that it is properly understood; that a wrong reliance would not be put on our obedience; that a wrong estimation of our obedience would not cloud our spiritual thinking. So let me say a few things. When you get deeply into the writings on good works and all of this, you will find that for centuries men have defined these things and they are defined very carefully, a positive statement immediately followed by a negative statement so that it would not be misunderstood. We mean this, we do not mean this. This is an area where it is ripe for misunderstanding and so we want to try to be careful so that we are not misunderstood here today.

Let's start here: when it comes to obedience, obedience is defined as obedience to the revealed precepts in God's word, okay? That's the kind of obedience that we're talking about. That's the only kind of true obedience there is. A true Christian, one who has truly embraced Christ by faith, the one who has repented of sin, put his faith in Christ, has been truly born again, that's the only kind of Christian there is, by the way, but a true

Christian will want to obey. A true Christian will obey, however imperfectly. He will obey. Jesus said this himself in John 14:15, he said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." The idea of a disobedient life that has no regard for God's word, that has no regard for obedience, that not only disobeys but encourages others to disobey, no matter if they do that in the name of Christ even, they are manifesting that they are not born again. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

He said in Matthew 5:19, turn there with me, Matthew 5:19. Remember that Jesus Christ himself came to fulfill the law. He came to obey the law, to fulfill it on behalf of us as part of the righteous sacrifice of his life that he would one day make at Calvary. That was the mindset of Christ that the law of God is not to be annulled or set aside. The one who truly belongs to Christ is going to have a similar reverence for the law; is going to have a spirit of obedience toward the true law of God that is like that after his Master. Verse 19 of Matthew 5,

19 "Whoever then annuls [sets aside] one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

So there is this response in the heart of a true Christian that honors the word of God, that seeks obedience as a proper response to salvation.

Now, how does God view that obedience? Well, God views our obedience, we'll probably talk about this next week or the week after that, God views our obedience not because it is perfect in and of itself, not because our obedience is perfect, our obedience is always going to be flawed because we are flawed and we offer a flawed obedience to God. So he accepts our obedience not because our obedience is perfect but because he accepts our obedience because we are in Christ, because we belong to Christ and he graciously accepts our obedience because it is offered to him in the name of his Son. That is a huge difference. That is a massive difference and so with that in mind, we can say God blesses our obedience. God blesses our obedience.

Look at the book of Hebrews 6 and, again, we're going to talk about this particular point more next week or in the following week after that, so we're just setting parameters here. What we're trying to do here today is set a context to minimize the danger of misunderstanding as we put obedience in its place.

Hebrews 6:10 says,

10 ... God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

The writer of Hebrews says, "God's not going to forget the effort that you've made to minister to his people. He's not unjust like that. Even though your obedience may be

flawed, he recognizes the sincerity of that, he recognizes that it's offered in the name of Christ, and he is not unjust to neglect that." God will bless our obedience to his revealed word as Christians. We could say on the other side, on the negative side of things, also from Hebrews, that when his children sin, God will discipline them.

Look at Hebrews 12, beginning in verse 4. He says,

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; 6 for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and he scourges every son whom He receives." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

So when we sin and as we have remnants of our corrupt nature still abiding in us, over the course of time there will be times where God disciplines us. The word will convict and reprove us. Providentially, he will bring trials into our lives that expose the sinfulness of our remaining corruption so that that can be corrected, so that that can be changed. It's not that God is indifferent to the holiness of his people, far to the contrary, part of the reason that God saved us is to make us holy.

Now with that said, so God blesses our obedience; when we sin, even as believers we can expect his discipline which is different, beloved, than saying we expect eternal condemnation as a result of that. Romans 8:1 says, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." When God brings discipline upon his children for their sin, he is doing so in love. He is doing it in a way that a parent disciplines the child, a father disciplines the son that he loves. He's not suddenly become hostile. He's not suddenly turned from favor to condemnation against us because of our sin. Rather, he sees that which needs to be corrected in order to attain the goal of our salvation which is Christ-likeness, and disciplines us so that we might learn not to be that way.

So a true Christian will want to obey. He will obey. God blesses obedience and he disciplines his children when they sin. These basics are crucial. Here in this series, here today, we're talking about something else. We're talking about another aspect of obedience. We're not talking about earning your salvation. We are not talking about earning the love of God or somehow trying to cling to keeping God loving us through our obedience, we're talking about legalism and we're talking about it in this series. We're addressing legalism as a way of thinking about God. Oh, it's so very important and it's in italics in my notes so I probably ought to say it again. We are talking about a way of thinking about God, that's what we are addressing, to help us see areas where perhaps our thinking is flawed, it is corrupt, we are thinking wrongly about how our relationship with God works.

R. C. Sproul said this, he said, "Some people seem to be preoccupied in the Christian life with obeying rules and regulations. They conceive of Christianity as being a series of do's

and don'ts, a cold and deadly set of moral principles. He is not so much seeking to obey God or honor Christ, as he is to obeying rules that are devoid of any personal relationship." You see, legalism looks at rules apart from any context of the glory of God, desiring God, or loving God, simply saying that, "I'm going to be concerned, I'm going to occupy my time, my thoughts, my thinking, with keeping the rules that are laid out before me." Some of you have come out of those types of environments and you know how deadly and soul-suffocating it can be. Well, let's just step back and remember what Christ said the greatest commandment was, the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all of your mind. The second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. This principle of love animating the spirit of the response of the true disciple to his God.

We obey God but not apart from our love for him. Our love for God, our love for Christ, our love for what he has done for us, motivates us and changes our motivations. A legalist doesn't see it that way. A legalist only has his code of conduct, his code of regulations and seeks to live by that. A legalist may proudly believe that he is entitled to certain blessings from God because he is keeping the rules. "I satisfy the standard. I'm doing the rules. I'm living the life, therefore, God owes me." The spirit of his obedience is that, "I am putting God under obligation to deal with me in my preferred way because I'm keeping the rules." And then when inevitably trials come, he complains because, "I didn't do anything to deserve this." That is the spirit of legalism that says, "I should be exempt from trials because I have kept the rules. I don't deserve this." Well, beloved, a mature understanding of Scripture and a mature understanding of the nature of man would never lead us there. It would never lead us there.

Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 64. Isaiah 64:6 says,

6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

When we have a right understanding of our obedience, the nature of our obedience even as Christians, we realize that even our best obedience still falls short of the glory of God. It's offered sincerely. God blesses that obedience for the sincere heart that offers it up, but as a sinful fallen creature, we cannot intrinsically offer obedience to God that is worthy of his great glory. We can't offer him obedience that apart from Christ deserves his blessing because our motives are mixed, our efforts are incomplete. I think about it this way. You know, my life kind of revolves around preaching and I do my best to preach to the glory of God but I know that my preaching in and of itself is not worthy of anything from God in and of itself. It's not a perfect obedience that I render to God because there is always more that I could have done, there is always more study, more reading, more that you could have done. You always could have prayed more in preparation. There is always more more more that you could have done and you just can't meet the standard of perfection that way. And yet, I preach, I honor it as a sincere act of worship to God and I trust him to bless what I have done because I offer it to him not in its own merit, not in my merits, I offer it to God as a service to Christ and in the name of Christ and for the

sake of Christ. So we realize that there is nothing that we do that demands and deserves to utter perfection a reward from God. He blesses us. He saved us in grace, he rewards our obedience in grace and there is nothing that we do that merits that, it is blessing that he gives to us in Christ.

So what we're saying here is that a legalist misses that point, believes that he has kept a standard, a proud legalist, you could say, and then his misdirected thinking is exposed when trials come and he says, "I didn't do anything to deserve this." Well, what did you do? What do you deserve? Why do you deserve blessing? Why do you deserve blessing? Why is God obligated to bless you? Because of what you've done? Don't you realize that even your best is like filthy garments before him? So this humbles us. It draws us. It drives us back to Christ who saved us when we see it in this perspective.

There is another side to legalism completely at the other end of the spectrum and yet driven by the very same principle of relating to God on the basis of rules rather than on the basis of Christ and on the basis of faith in Christ. There is this legalist, when I say this legalist, there is this kind of legalism where the legalist who fails goes into despair. He struggles with sin and he tries to multiply rules and he decides, "I'm going to try harder and harder and harder," trying harder apart from turning to Christ for grace and help and mercy in his time of need. So he goes into despair and he comes to this conclusion in his legalistic mind, "God could never love me. God could never forgive me. My sin is just too great," because the rules have crushed him so, and he comes to a conclusion that he's not worthy of the love of God and that God, therefore, will not love him at all under any conditions. Well, beloved, let me just say this and to say it in love, say it in kindness: that preoccupation with self, that inward looking preoccupation with sin that comes to the conclusion that God could never love me, God will never love me, all is lost, woe is me, all of that is just a perverse form of pride. It's a perverse form of pride. "My sin is so great that even God can't forgive it."

Well, Scripture addresses that mindset in 1 Timothy 1 and, again, the problem here is looking at sin, looking at rules apart from Christ. When you look at your failure, you look at your sin through the lens of Christ, you come to a completely different conclusion and this is what we're trying to get at with our feeble efforts here this morning. 1 Timothy 1:15. Actually, let's go back to verse 12 here in 1 Timothy 1:12 and set the context. Paul says,

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor.

He said, "I used to be a blasphemer. I used to persecute the church. I was violent against them and,

Yet I was shown mercy [I was shown kindness] because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; 14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. 15 It is a trustworthy

statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Paul says, "I am the chief of sinners. I was the worst of the worst. I've outlined my sins for you and do you know what Christ did? He saved me. Despite my unworthiness, he saved me in grace and mercy." And he draws a principle that applies to all sinners everywhere henceforth and forever more until Christ returns in verse 16,

16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

We talked about five words of Gospel hope a couple of years ago and you just find them woven throughout passages like this of mercy, of grace, of patience, and the Gospel of Christ demolishes this legalism that leads to despair by coming and saying that Christ saves even the worst of sinners. Believe in Christ and even you will be saved. Believe in Christ and even you will find yourself on the receiving end of his love and mercy, his patience, his kindness, his goodness. So we realize from the reasoning of Scripture that if God saved Paul, he will save all kinds of sinners. He'll save all kinds of sinners including you. You have not sinned yourself beyond grace. The call of God goes out and says, "Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved," Romans 10.

You see, legalism can't abide that offer of free mercy, can't abide that. It has to weigh things down with conditions and with rules and people that are trapped in this mindset, I say this as a word of mercy not as a word of condemnation, people who are trapped in that mindset have not entered fully into the meaning of the Gospel. So the answer if you're in that kind of legalistic despair, the answer to your sin, the answer to your guilt, is not more rules and trying harder, the answer to your despair is to turn to Christ who says, "I have mercy. I have grace. I have patience on sinners of all kind," and find mercy in him. And that wells up hope. That wells up joy in your soul. "I can be forgiven by a holy God through confession and faith in Christ and have my record wiped clean and know that I am accepted by a holy God." [Hallelujah!] Hallelujah is right.

But multiplying the rules will never lead you to that kind of joy and peace and that's the problem with this legalism that leads to despair. Ultimately, beloved, we need to name it and call it for what it is. If a man refuses to turn to Christ in that legalistic despair, he is simply manifesting another form of unbelief and rather than being allowed to continue in that, he needs to be called to Christ. As an unbeliever, as a believer weighed down with guilt and sin, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You say, "But shouldn't there be a price paid for my sin before I can be reconciled to God?" Well, beloved, isn't that the whole point of the Gospel, the price has been paid not by you but by Christ at Calvary? Yes, there was a price to pay for your sin and Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord, he paid it all, as we so often sing.

So we receive this forgiveness by faith not through multiplying rules, but now having tried to set some parameters, set some understanding so that we can distinguish what is being said and what's not being said here today, let's put that aside for a moment and now think as Christians, address Christians here today, and help us to think biblically about the obedience that we do give to God as Christians. If it is true that if we love him we will keep his commandments, we want to know, we want to ask and answer the question today: what is the place of that obedience in our lives? What is its role in the broad scheme of salvation? What is its role in sanctification? What is the place of obedience?

Well, let's clarify first what it's not one more time, let's clarify first what your obedience as a Christian is not, and when we say what it is not, we say what we are trying to clarify is what motivates you to obey as a Christian and how do you think about your obedience in relationship to the Christ, the God who saved you. Here is what it is not: beloved, you do not obey as a Christian in order to get love that God would otherwise withhold from you. Beloved, God accepts you in Christ. If you are saved, Ephesians 1 says, he has given to you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He has given Christ to you and all of the love that God the Father reposes in his Son, you become the recipient of that because you are joined, you are unified to Christ by faith. So you are not trying to get more love from God, he has already freely given you all things, Romans 8. To be a Christian means that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1. We still feel the weight of our sin, we still want to grow in Christ, we still need to grow in Christ, but God has poured his love out on us in Christ. There is no condemnation for you in Christ because, beloved, go back to the cross, Jesus bore the curse for you in his body on the cross, Galatians 3. Therefore, we are not obeying to try to forestall the hand of judgment against us as if God's judgment would come down on us, his eternal fury would still threaten us. Not in Christ it doesn't because Christ has paid the price of that judgment. He absorbed the wrath of God, he drank the cup to the full, he drank it to the dregs, he paid it all. That's why he could say at the end of his time on the cross, "It is finished." The work of redemption is done. The penalty of sin has been paid in full, which is what that term means. Paid in full. Stamped. No further obligation left. The law no longer condemns you. Jesus Christ satisfied the demands of the law on our behalf. He paid the penalty of sin in full and so our obedience could never be related to a threat of the fear of that kind of punishment. 1 John 4 says, "There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear," and the context of that is that God sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We have messages on that that you can look up online.

So, beloved, when we say that you do not obey to get love that God would otherwise withhold, let me quote someone else, our friend John MacArthur who says this. Listen carefully. He says and I quote, "The Christian pursues practical holiness not to enter a relationship with God or to earn his love. He pursues practical holiness because he has already entered a relationship with God by grace through faith in Christ, and because he is already the recipient of God's love and favor in Christ." If you are in Christ, if you are a Christian here this morning, God has set his love upon you in an irreversible, irrevocable way as a result of his free sovereign choice. It is what he wanted to do and his love came to you because he wanted to show grace to you like the Apostle Paul. He wanted to show mercy to you. Well, bless his name for that, and he did that, Romans 4:5 says that God

justifies the ungodly. David prayed in Psalm 51, "God, have mercy on me because my sin is great." The point of David's request for mercy, the premise of it was not, "God, be merciful to me because I've been a pretty good guy." The point in that petition was, "God, have mercy on me because my sin is great." Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. It's not those who are well who need a physician, it's those who are sick."

So when we come to Christ and we lay before him our sin-broken souls, our sin-judged souls, our guilty beyond what we understand and recognize, our guilty souls, and we come to Christ and say, "Save me," we do that apart from any personal merit of our own. We don't bring merit to the table that causes God to respond to us. He saves us for the sake of Christ. He saves us in love. He saves us in grace. He saves us in kindness, in mercy, in patience. He brought you into his family and your obedience did not contribute to motivate him to do that at all because there is no boasting. The principle of grace excludes any idea of boasting. So God brings us to Christ, he draws us to Christ, he saves us in Christ, he deposits the Holy Spirit within us, the guarantee of our future redemption, our final redemption, and he does all of this for us as an act of grace, of kindness and mercy, and he did that even though you had no obedience to merit that, to obligate him to do that. You were a beggar, you were bankrupt, you were poor in spirit before him and he did that and in response to that understanding of grace, we are humbled. We bow before him. We thank him for that and we realize that somehow God is dealing with us on a principle of love that comes from within his own character, not in our own merit. Do you see that? That is crucial to everything. This determines everything going forward.

Now with that being true, we ask the question: well then, why do we obey, then? What's the point of obedience if God has already saved us apart from our merit? Well, I'm going to give you seven things really quick here. You obey because it advances multiple kingdom goals. You obey because it is a proper response of love and gratitude to such an undeserved act of mercy on your soul. You obey because God – these aren't the points yet, I'm just introducing them – you obey because it flows out of the new nature that God has given to you in Christ. You've got a new principle of life. You've been born again and your life now operates out of that new principle of spiritual life that is in you rather than according to the old man, and you obey not on a principle of legalism as we have defined it here, but on a principle of faith, of love, of response to what's been given.

So why do we obey as Christians? How can we put obedience in its place? Number one here, and we're going to run through these really quick. I thought about making it two messages but I decided not to. There is a lot of content in this message, I realize that, and like I say, I thought about making it two messages but I'm going to do it all at once here. If you want two messages, listen to the CD twice and you can get two messages out of it. I encourage you to do that. It's good to share in a moment like that together, isn't it? To realize that the consideration of these things even with an overly intense preacher can still be a matter of joy and love together, I like that.

Point 1, why do we owe obey? 1. Obedience brings glory to God. Obedience brings glory to God and those of you that in the future might read chapter 16 of the Westminster

Confession of Faith or chapter 16 of our confession, the London Confession of 1689, will find a lot of parallels between that and what I'm saying here this morning even though I phrase it and use it just a little bit differently. Everything that I'm saying here I intend to align with our confession of faith, particularly as it is found in chapter 16.

1. Obedience brings glory to God. Now here's what we can say about that. We're going to go through this really quick. Christ delivered you from the power of sin in your salvation. He did that so that your life would glorify God by showing forth the holiness of God; that your life would become a display where however imperfectly, there would be a display of the glory of God, the holiness of God through your life.

I'm just going to read these scriptures. Let me encourage you to just write down the Scripture reference and look them up later as you listen to the message twice in the future. 1 Peter 1, beginning in verse 14. We're saying obedience brings glory to God. Why do we obey? We obey because obedience brings glory to God. Why do we want to bring glory to God? Because we're so grateful that he saved us that he deserves glory, that we want our lives to be a reflection of praise to the one who showed such great love, grace, mercy, kindness and patience toward us. It's the only way we know how to live. Our affections have been captured by someone so much greater than us and we respond to him in love, not according to rules, but yet while we respond to him in love, there is an element of obedience that marks our response of love.

1 Peter 1:14. Why do we obey God? Because obedience brings glory to God. The Bible says this,

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Your obedience, your holy life is a reflection back to the source found in the glory and the holiness of God.

1 Peter 2:12 says,

12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

That's 1 Peter 2:12. Our obedience, God at times is pleased to use our obedience to testify to unbelievers and cause them to give glory to him.

2. Why do we obey God? Well, number 2: obedience is a primary purpose of your salvation. Obedience is a primary purpose of your salvation. Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord Jesus did not save you because you were good, he saved you even though you were not good, but he saved you in part to cleanse you so that you would

become obedient, so that your life would grow in the likeness of the one who saved you. Scripture is abundantly clear on this and the antinomians that are out in the world I don't believe can deal honestly with these texts at all.

Ephesians 2:10,

10 ... we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

God before time began purposed what your life would look like. He purposed to save you in Christ and as part of saving you, his purpose was that you would walk through the life that he has appointed in a way that shows forth good works, that shows forth obedience, and he appointed things in advance that as you go through time and meet them, you would respond with obedience that would show forth the purpose of your salvation.

Titus 2:14,

14 [Christ] gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

At the core of the saving purpose of Christ was to make a people who were zealous for obedience to him; who were zealous for his glory; that were passionate; that lived for him; that were motivated by his purpose not self. And one of the ways that you can recognize a true Christian is that somewhere in their makeup, somewhere in their animating life principle, somewhere in their affections, there is this desire that says, "I really want to honor Christ with my life. I want to live an obedient life because, not because it will save me, not because I need to earn God's love. God already loves me. He loves me in Christ. Because of that not to get that, because God has been like that toward me, because I am in this union with Christ, because I am soaked in love beyond compare, oh, I want to obey him. I want to please him. I want my life to bring honor to the one who had such grace, mercy, love, kindness and patience toward me." That's why we obey. That's the primary purpose of our salvation. Christ defined it for us in his word. "Here's why I saved you, I saved you in part so that you would be zealous for good works; so that you would walk in the good works which God prepared for you beforehand." I don't struggle with needing a purpose in life. I know what my purpose is. However badly I fulfill it, my purpose is to glorify the one who gave his life for me, and if you're a Christian, that's your purpose in life too and that's the noblest highest purpose that any man could ever have for his existence.

3. I've got to keep moving here. Obedience strengthens your assurance. Obedience strengthens your assurance. Now, we've already said a thousand times, I'm not going to repeat myself except for this once more, and the other times that I'll repeat myself in the future. Yeah, you got that. I'm glad. Biblical obedience does not build up merit before God but it does display the reality of his grace in our lives. It shows forth what's already

true inside. Obedience shows forth the work of God that is hidden in the depths of the human heart when a man is truly saved.

1 John 2:3,

3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

It's not that we come to know him by keeping his commandments, but rather the obedience of a Christian displays the pre-existing reality. We have come to know him as obedience flows out of our lives.

James 2:18 says,

18 ... 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."

He says, "I can display to you the reality of my faith. It is shown in the works of my life, the works that are however imperfectly patterned after what God commands in his word." You know, well, let's just go to point number 4.

Point 4: obedience expresses love and thanksgiving to God. Obedience expresses love and thanksgiving to God. Now, we give thanks with our lips, "Lord, thank you for my salvation. Thank you for Christ. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the shed blood which paid the price of my redemption. God, I thank you, thank you verbally, I ascribe my praise and thanksgiving to you." But the thanksgiving is expressed also in life with how we live. John 14:15, I quoted it earlier,

15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

Jesus ties obedience to love to him. This is an expression of, again, the obedience is an expression of a pre-existing love relationship with Christ and he says, "If you love Me in reality, it will be displayed in your obedience." Don't put the cart before the horse but understand that the cart follows the horse when it is attached by faith.

Hebrews 13:15 and 16,

15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

So what have we said? We've said four things so far: obedience brings glory to God; obedience is a primary purpose of your salvation; obedience strengthens your assurance; obedience expresses love and thanksgiving to God. Point 5: obedience adorns the Gospel. Obedience adorns the Gospel. A believer's obedience makes the Gospel attractive. It makes it look good. I had a boss who said, "Your job is to make me look good. As my

subordinate," I don't know if this was my boss or I am remembering somebody else but it doesn't matter, the principle is the same, "Your job as my employee under my supervision is to make me look good," he said. Well, you do your job well, you make your boss look good. Well, in a like manner when we are obedient to Christ, it makes the Gospel look good. It makes it attractive to others.

Matthew 5:16,

16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Titus 2:9,

9 Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

Let them see your good works that they would glorify your Father who is in heaven. Slaves, obey your masters so that you will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. Obedience adorns the Gospel. It makes it attractive.

6. Obedience silences the opponents of the Gospel. Obedience silences the opponents of the Gospel in certain settings. Obviously it doesn't silent all everywhere at all times forever. Christ will only do that when he returns, but our lives, our obedience may silence ungodly critics where arguments will not.

1 Peter 2:15, let's turn there just to give your mind a break as you turn to the Scripture here. I've got two verses out of 1 Peter here. We're almost done. 1 Peter 2:15, obedience silences the components of the Gospel. 1 Peter 2:15,

15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

In chapter 3, verse 16,

16 ... keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Notice that it's your behavior that puts them to shame. Notice that it's by doing right that you silence the ignorance of foolish men. Obedience has a silencing effect on the opponents of the Gospel.

Finally, number 7: obedience stimulates other Christians to faithfulness. That's right, your obedience stimulates other Christians to faithfulness. They see your example and maybe

it calls them to a higher standard. They say, "I need to be living more like that. I'm convicted. I need to be more like that. I need to obey myself. I myself need to obey," is what I mean by that. There is a broader sphere to our obedience. You shouldn't simply think about your obedience as a silo vertically before God, your life has an impact on those around you.

Hebrews 10:24 and 25,

24 ... let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,  
25 not forsaking our own assembling together...but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

So what we've tried to do today is put obedience in its place. It does not give you merit before God. God did not save you because you were obedient but now that God has saved you, obedience is the response of the redeemed heart, a response of love, of gratitude, of desire. Where grace and faith – oh, this is my last sentence here – where grace and faith are operative, where God's grace in Christ is recognized and the man or the woman has put their faith in Christ for his or her salvation, then obedience has great purpose as a reflection of that prior greater reality, and in the context of grace and faith, for you and me as Christians, obedience is a great delight.

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Father, give clarity to our minds and understanding about these things. Guard us from the legalism that is rooted in things that are only made by man and that have no value before God. Protect us, Lord, from a perspective on obedience where we think that we deserve things from you because, Father, we still fall far short of your glory in so many ways. Father, keep us from that legalistic despair that doesn't truly rest in Christ. Move people that are in that element of sorrow out of their introspection and into that outward look to Christ where the price for sin was paid in full and where the arms of mercy are opened wide. Father, we all need that. Lead us through an understanding of your word that we might see Christ as that great Physician of our souls, the spiritual Doctor, as it were, who gladly heals all our diseases, and let our response as it was in Psalm 103 be, "Bless the Lord, O my soul. Bless the Lord and forget not any of his benefits." We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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