

When taking a glimpse at our current era, one of the most astonishing observations about large segments of the modern church in a place like America is this: *a relatively small percentage of those who claim to follow Christ actually obey Him in executing some of His key commands!* And, frankly, that extends into lots of individual transactions in everyday life of sincere Christians! Hey, you might be saying, *what in the world are you talking about...that only a small percentage of Christians actually obey Christ?* Well, let's start by backing up and visiting a mix of several anchoring truths from the Bible—as well as a couple of important observations involving those truths.

First, Christ “gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2 ESV)—and every person in the whole world can believe on Christ in God’s New Covenant! So, in the Way that is Jesus, the New Covenant is truly a better covenant, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us. That’s because this New Covenant has been enacted on better promises. Here’s Hebrews 8:6: “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”

So, it is true that, because of Christ’s sacrificial actions on humanity’s behalf, Christians who believe in Christ are saved and therefore are “not under the law but under grace” (Romans 6:14). But here’s a common reality: many Christians unapologetically and, to be frank, often pridefully measure themselves and their quality as Christians by how well they think they keep the law of Moses—and they measure their own kids and their fellow Christians’ children by how well all those kids keep the law of Moses, too!

Yes, indeed, many Christians take the Old Covenant very seriously *as the major determining compass and measure* of their religious lives—yeah, using the Law above that of the New Covenant of which Jesus Himself is the High Priest. Sadly, for these Christians, obedience to the Law of Moses is the *de facto* key, yes, their key is *not* in obeying Christ’s commands... But, in fact, the Bible teaches that Christ fulfilled the Law! (Matthew 5:17) That’s why believers have freedom in Christ, He fulfilled the Law on believers’ behalf!

...OK, you might say, so how are we to obey Christ...all you seem to be claiming here is a freedom that is a license to sin! Hey, listener, have you heard that one before? Even more so, have you yourself thought that such folks are taking a false path? Or perhaps you yourself have condemned others for that before? Well, you’re in good company, that thinking and that condemnation of others happens all the time! But the foundational thing to consider before that assertion is made is this key question: *what person who does think all that and who does condemn others for that freedom is himself or herself without sin?*

Well, someone pretty famous—Jesus Himself—mentioned that long ago when speaking to legalist accusers of an adulteress: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” Yes, John records that story in his gospel...chapter 8, verse 7.

The great irony here is this: some who accuse those who might rely on the gift of grace as “creating” a license to sin seem to be going a step further—*those legalists are committing their own sins without any supposed license to sin whatsoever at all!* Therefore, the judgement of God is upon them, for their own pattern of sins plus—yes, their hypocritical condemnation of others!

Of course, the Bible teaches that the salvific grace of God *isn’t* a license, it’s a gift! And you know what? New Covenant believers can and often do lead Spirit-led, sanctified lives under the gift of God’s grace!

Now, we get back to the question posed just a bit of time ago. How are followers of Christ to obey Him, then? Well, that *is* a very key question and a key to living a life in Christ to the full! Here’s how one of the lawyers confronted Jesus in His time and place... “But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the

Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:34-40) Note this important phrase within that: the first command is to love your God “with all your heart, soul, and mind.” *Now that’s very key!*

In this way, of course, *in this one bold stroke*, Jesus did not abolish the Law, He merely yet completely refocused it first and foremost to the motivation and focus of all who would follow Him and do His will! Again, that is key—it isn’t whether one can follow the exact letter of the law, it’s whether we work to have our hearts right in all that we do and whether we really want to do and work to effect God’s will!

In fact, the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to address this through an Old Testament reference in the context of Paul’s speech to the men of Israel in the New Covenant era: “And when [God] had removed [Saul], he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’” That’s right, a person *after God’s heart...* “*who will do all my will.*”

And what is God’s will for New Covenant believers in the Christ crucified on the Cross? Well, *to become others-centric!* Yes, to love God with all their hearts, vertically if you will, and to love their neighbors, horizontally if you will. Yeah, our workplace neighbors, our neighborhood neighbors, and our neighbors in New York and Phoenix and Nigeria and China and Argentina. And how do we best—most fully—express God’s love on His behalf?...

Well, that’s very clear: by proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom like Jesus did (Mark 1:14-15) and making disciples worldwide, acting under the authority given Jesus and delegated to us. Yes, in Matthew 28:18-19, just before His crucifixion, Jesus said, “...‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...’” Tell me, is this just a *suggestion...* or is it a *command* from Jesus? Is the authority Jesus has been given and is calling upon to be ignored by His followers? Hardly.

As if that’s not enough, the crucified, Resurrected Christ with scars in His hands was seen by 500...and His last words recorded before His Ascension echoed the Great Commission He voiced in Matthew 28: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Is there any question this is God’s clear will for believers, those who have a heart after God to do His will? After all, 1 Timothy 2:4 says that “God our Savior desires all people to be saved.” And Peter says that God wishes “none would perish.”

So, if believers are to be under the authority given to their Lord and they do have a heart after God, why are so many self-professing Christians not obedient to Jesus’s commands to “go forth” ...to love God and love individuals with the greatest love ever, the going and the sending of the Gospel worldwide.

Hey, the observable reality is, some folks professing Christ in America and Europe are just following fads or traditions...yet others are locked into the Law of Moses, being legalistic in substitution of the commands of Jesus to love others with the Gospel! That’s right, at best, they’re embracing a lesser covenant that the New Covenant has made obsolete (Hebrews 8). OK, then, what is the nature and source of our obedience? Well, our obedience is the Spirit-led life of a new creature in Christ...yes, one full of the power promised by Jesus—again I’m quoting Christ: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”

Galatians 2:8 captures the amazing yielding to God by both Peter and Paul: “for [God] who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles.” Yes, in the New Covenant, those Spirit-led, new creatures in Christ who have a heart after God and want to do His will are those who are obedient.

Yeah, obedience is not about the Mosaic Law, it’s about serving God with your whole heart and therefore doing His will with the Good News! Powerfully so, Spirit-led. Wow, what a privilege that is!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you, being a New Covenant believer in Christ “not under the law but under grace,” truly think and work to try to fully do God’s will? Discuss.

2. Do you believe that Jesus’s Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19) and His last words in Acts 1:8 before His Ascension were intended solely for or limited to the early church? Or, if it *is* for the modern church, are the actions taken as part of the Great Commission intended to be limited to just pastors and appointed missionaries? Discuss.

3. Are you an effective conduit of the power and leading of the Holy Spirit in you as a new creature in Christ into powerful relationship and witness for Christ...with your family? ...With your neighbors? ...In your workplace? ...In your helping to send effective missionaries to the end of the earth? Discuss.