

7. The Obedience of Faith

Review previous weeks briefly to set context for this week

The gospel is crucified between two thieves: legalism and license

“Healing from duty, and not from Christ, is the most desperate disease. Poor, ragged nature, with all its highest improvements, can never spin a garment fine enough (without spot) to cover the soul’s nakedness. “ Thomas Wilcox, “Honey Out of the Rock”

Q: How can we live in a way that avoids legalism on the one side and license/defeat on the other?

A: the obedience of faith!

Rom 16:25-26 – Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith--

Rom 1:5 - Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

1 Thes. 1:3 - We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:11-14 - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Titus 3:8 - This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

1 Pet. 1:1-2 - To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

2 Jn 6 - And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

7.1 How is Faith related to Obedience?

7.1a Related as root and fruit- we naturally obey whatever we trust

Heb. 11:6 - And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

“consider how Good Works stand related to Faith, and to Justification, respectively. They are the effects of faith, and, as such, the evidences both of faith, and of justification.” James Buchanan

“...Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, can not put away our sins, and endure the severity of God’s judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.” 39 Articles

The obedience of faith springs from a principle within, and not from compulsion without. It is sustained by the mind's soberest reasoning and the heart's warmest passion. The man reasons with himself that he ought to obey his Redeemer, his Father, his God; and, at the same time, the love of Christ constrains him so to do, and thus what argument suggests affection performs. A sense of great obligation, an apprehension of the fitness of obedience, and spiritual renewal of heart, work an obedience which becomes essential to the sanctified soul. - Spurgeon Sermon “The Obedience of Faith”

On occasion, you should do what is right because of duty, if that is the highest motivation you can muster. But far more often you should do what is right because of the love you have for the one for whom you are doing it.

- cp. good deeds for spouse/lover,
- cp. parents taking care of children

7.1b C=D+V+S

Change =

Discontent with the way things are +

Vision for a better future +

Achievable Small Steps

Faith is trust that we don't have to stay the way we are

Faith is a Vision for something better

Faith is trusting that God's ways/methods will get us where we want to be

7.2 Obedience of faith is non-negotiable

Heb. 12:14 without holiness no one will see the Lord

new birth really does change lives – lives that are not changed should question if they are born like a dog that does not bark or wag the tail or poop

Gal. 5:6 - For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. [faith works]

2 Tim 2:19 - Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

1 Pet 4:17 - For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

2 Thes. 1:8 – Jesus will be revealed in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Heb. 1:6 – without faith it is impossible to please God

“The obedience of faith is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him.” -Dei Verbum, no. 5

we are saved by grace through faith alone, but not through faith that is alone

James 1:14, 17-18, 22- “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?...In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.... [speaking of Abraham] You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”

“Faith without obedience is not faith, but wishful thinking.” Bishop O.W. Prince

Not obey once we have everything figured out, but we understand BY obeying.

How George Macdonald responds to someone who might say: *“But I do not know how to awake and arise!”*

“I will tell you. Get up, and do something the Master tells you; so make yourself his disciple at once. Instead of asking yourself whether you believe or not, ask yourself whether you have this day done one thing because he said, Do it, or once abstained because he said, Do not do it. It is simply absurd to say you believe, or even want to believe in him, if you do not anything he tells you. If you can think of nothing he ever said as having had an atom of influence on your doing or not doing, you have too good ground to consider yourself no disciple of his.

But you can begin at once to be a disciple of the Living One – by obeying him in the first thing you can think of in which you are not obeying him. We must learn to obey him in everything, and so must begin somewhere. Let it be at once, and in the very next thing that lies at the door of our conscience! Of fools

and slow of heart, if you think of nothing but Christ, and do not set yourselves to do his words! You but build your houses on the sand." (From *Creation in Christ* by George MacDonald)

7.2 ½ Against Legalism and Licence

Both lack of faith –
Both not believing and applying the Gospel
Both replacing God with an idol of our own making

Lengthy quote by J.D. Greear

"By "legalism" I mean the idea that Christianity is a set of commands which, if you obey them, will improve your standing in the eyes of God and make you a "faithful Christian." By "license" I mean the idea that because Christ has redeemed us from any curse on our sin, we can "do whatever we want" because our sin is already paid for.

I think we should reconsider that polarization, because I think they may be more like stepbrothers than polar opposites.

"License" is not the polar opposite of legalism, it is simply another type of legalism.

Both religious and non-religious legalists operate from a position of emptiness and shame. They both think that they must obtain something in order to overcome that emptiness and shame.

Both legalism and license reject what God has declared about us in the Gospel and attempt to build an identity and find fulfillment based on what we can obtain or what we accomplish. You see, the "licentious sinner" is really nothing but a secularized legalist. How so? The licentious sinner thinks that by obtaining some "law" (meeting some standard, finding some degree of pleasure) he can find identity and happiness.

In other words, both legalism and license flow out of unbelief in the Gospel. Thus, they are not opposites, but two flowers that share the same root.

The opposite of both "legalism" and "licentiousness" is faith in the Gospel—believing what God has declared about His relationship to us in the Gospel and finding your fulfillment in that. The Gospel declares that our identity before God is a gift God gave to us that we simply receive, and we find fulfillment in the fact that the God of the Universe is our Father, Protector, and Friend. In response to that, out of love and adoration for the God that gave Himself to us, we become loving, unselfish people who pursue righteousness and generosity because that is the desire of our hearts.

Christians who are still pursuing sin do not need a little "legalism" thrown in to balance them out and curb their sinful tendencies. What they need is the Gospel.

God is not after just obedience, He's after a whole different kind of obedience. But what if Christians in our churches hear this and use this as an excuse not to be generous and to pursue worldliness and sin? Well... Martin Luther said, "If you are never accused of antinomianism (preaching in a way that communicates to some that they are free to go and sin) you are not really preaching Gospel." So, if my preaching the Gospel causes some whose hearts are darkened and calloused by sin to interpret it as license to do whatever they want, that's fine. Their condemnation is written in their own behavior, which reveals the damnable filthiness of their hearts. But motivating them to obey by giving them a "you better do this or else" is, from

the perspective of the Gospel, utterly useless. It is “legal obedience,” but not obedience that flows from love, and obedience that is useless, eternally speaking, to God. In fact, curbing their materialism and sinful tendencies by “go and do” sermons may only cover up the fact to them that their hearts are depraved and wicked and keep them from running to Christ for salvation. So, if you want to set up polar opposites, don’t polarize legalism and license, polarize faith and unbelief. Faith is believing what God says about you in the Gospel and finding your fulfillment in that. Unbelief rejects God’s declaration, and seeks fulfillment in something else. We may pursue favor in the eyes of God and man by living up to some religious standard, or we might pursue fulfillment in the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. Either way, we are pursuing fulfillment and righteousness out of unbelief and idolatry, not from faith in the Gospel. Thus, the opposite of legalism is not license, it is Gospel. Legalism and license are fruits of the same root, unbelief. Only the Gospel pulls up that root.

7.3 How do we have the obedience of faith?

How can we see more and more of this in our life?

How can this be a reality, and not just theory?

Who will save me from this body of sin, wretched man that I am?

Christ will do it by His Holy Spirit, but He has called us to participate in this transformation

There is much we can and must do

7.3a Feed Faith

1 Pet. 2:2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation

Emphasis is on the fervency of the babies desire

Faith is not self-generated, but connected to an object Who is worth trusting

Faith as trust

Don’t look at your faith, but look at Christ.

Heb. 3:1 - Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

Heb. 12:2-3 - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb 12:2 NIV)

"Christological preaching feeds the soul and build faith. Faith is not built by preaching introspectively (constantly challenging people to question whether they have faith); faith is not built by preaching moralistically (which has exactly the opposite effect of focusing attention on the self rather than on Christ, in whom our faith is placed); Faith is built by careful, thorough exposition of the person, character, and work of Christ.

One of the great articulations of this reality occurs in a letter written by Clement Read Vaughn to the renowned Southern Presbyterian theologian Robert Lewis Dabney... In his latter years, [Dabney] became blind and weak, and knew his death was near. He wrote to his old friend Vaughn,

wondering whether he would have strong enough faith to face his impending death, and Vaughn wrote back to Dabney and asked Dabney what a traveler would do if he came to a chasm over which a bridge was spanned:

What does he do to breed confidence in the bridge? He looks at the bridge; he gets down and examines it. He doesn't stand at the bridge-head and turn his thoughts curiously in on his own mind to see if he has confidence in the bridge. If his examination of the bridge gives him a certain amount of confidence, and yet he wants more, how does he make his faith grow? Why, in the same way; he still continues to examine the bridge. Now, my dear old man, let your faith take care of itself for a while, and you just think of what you are allowed to trust in. Think of the Master's power, think of his love; think how he is interested in the soul that searches for him, and will not be comforted until he finds him. Think of what he has done, his work. That blood of his is mightier than all the sins of all the sinners that ever lived. Don't you think it will master yours?...

May God give you grace, not to lay too much stress on your faith, but to grasp the great ground of confidence, Christ, and all his work in all his personal fitness to be a sinner's refuge. Faith is only an eye to see him. I've been praying that God would quiet your pains as you advance, and enable you to see the gladness of the gospel at every step. Good-bye. God be with you as he will. Think of the bridge!...

I believe that as people's confidence in Christ grows, they do, ordinarily and inevitably, bear fruit that accords with faith. ...Preach Christ, and you'll have morality. Fill the sails of your hearers' souls with the wind of confidence in the Redeemer, and they will trust him as their sanctifier, and long to see his fruit in their lives. Fill their minds and imaginations with a vision of loveliness and perfection of Christ in his person, and the flock will long to be like him. Impress upon their weak and wavering hearts the utter competence of the mediation of the One who ever lives to make intercession for them, and they will long to serve and comfort others, even as Christ has served and comforted them." Why Johnny Can't Preach, pp. 75-8

What are we to preach to ourselves to feed our faith?

"Faith in God as having the right to command our obedience" – Spurgeon

"Faith in the rightness of all He says and does" - Spurgeon

Faith in God as having our highest good as His sincere, highest intention

Faith in God as able and willing to empower our obedience and make up for our disobedience

Faith in Future Grace

Faith that the benefit is greater than the cost - because God promised

Trust that God is trustworthy,

Gen 22 – story of Abraham obediently offering Isaac – interpreted in

Rom 4:17-21 - He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. 18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

And in Heb 11:17-19 - By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

See also Jesus' example in 1 Pet. 2:21-23 - To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Rom 10:17 Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. – be much in the Scriptures and your faith will grow

You can't expect to grow if you starve yourself of the nutrition that is necessary for life

7.3b Realize/Consider the Truth

Truth of the Gospel

Truth of the Kingdom

Truth of God's Story

Truth of Your destiny

Truth of Your justification/Forgiveness

Truth of your Sanctification

Truth of Your place in the already/not yet

Truth of your death and new life

Truth of your changed/new heart

&&&&&&&&& Rom 6, Col. 3, Eph 4, 1 Pet 4:1-2, Gal 4:6-7 &&&&&&&&&

Obey the form of teaching, You did not learn Christ this way

7.3c Offer yourself to righteousness

Rom 6

Don't let sin reign in you so that you present yourself to unrighteousness

Rather present yourself to God

as those who ARE living from the dead

And present your members as instruments/tools of righteousness

Being set free from sin, you HAVE BEEN enslaved to righteousness

Just as you used to offer your members in slavery to sin

So now offer your members as slaves to righteousness, unto holiness/sanctification

Rom 12:1-2

All in for God in every area of life

Put off old man and put on new man Eph 4/Col 3

"Gotta serve somebody" - Bob Dylan

"If you love me keep my commands" John and 1 Jn

7.3d Live by the Spirit

Gal 5:16ff.

not serve flesh when living by Spirit, Who wars against the flesh
Keep plugged in to the empowering presence of God in your life
More on living by the Spirit later in class

7.3e Flee Idolatry

Heb. 12:1-2 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

kick off everything that hinders

2 Tim 2:22 - So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

1 Jn 5:21 - Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

1 Pet 2:11 - Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Rev. 18:1-5 - After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. 3 For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." 4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; 5 for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

Already talked much about the inner idols of the heart – kill them

Also carefully avoid the outward acts and temptations

That means carefully avoiding the occasions of temptations

constant need to be vigilant and mortify sin and the idols of our heart

7.3f Pursue Christ/Pursue Joy

Pursue Christ above all other Joys - God is the Gospel

Phil 3:7ff.

Heb 11- Moses left Egypt for better inheritance, Abraham left for better country

"For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" v.10

"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." V. 26

“God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” V. 40

“You worshipped your way in to this, you will worship your way out of it”

“The expulsive power of a superior affection”

Trading up – examples

Turning off libido for sake of higher desire

7.3g Accountability

Heb. 3:13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Heb. 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

contrast Fellowship

counter individualistic view/self-centeredness

with real Biblical fellowship/accountability/love

good and false ways to do it

role of others in meaningful change

license or legalistic or navigating safely between

Will go more in depth in weeks to come on this

The faith that makes us obey is alone the faith which marks the children of God. It is better to have the faith that obeys than the faith which moves mountains. I would sooner have the faith which obeys than the faith which heaps the altar of God with sacrifices, and perfumes his courts with incense. I would rather obey God than rule an empire; for, after all, the loftiest sovereignty a soul can inherit is to have dominion over self by rendering believing obedience to the Most High.- Spurgeon