

To
OBEY
Or Do We Need To
OBEY
That is the Question!!!

There is an ongoing issue that we all have heard or been a part of these past years within the Body of Christ. Great theological minds have debated and brought forth doctrines which vary and are on opposite ends of the “theological” spectrum. It is a topic of discussion that I, honestly, have had difficulty in understanding the schism which it has caused. I am referring to the debate over following and keeping the commands, precepts and principles found in what we know as the Word of God.

One side states that we are no longer under “the Law” and we are free from having to keep it. The other side states that we are to strictly obey and keep the commandments of God, or else.... Some of us are “schizophrenic” even concerning the side of the debate we are on. For example, we get all up in arms when we hear about some local government’s decision to take off the “10 Commandments” from being displayed in any government building. We cry out against those kinds of decisions. Yet, when we discuss obedience of and to those same commandments within the Body of Christ, we sometimes offer a different view. It seems like we do not want to take the “10 commandments” off of the walls of our government buildings but it is okay to take them off of the walls of our churches.

I do not pretend to have, nor do I think I know all the answers. In the following few paragraphs, I desire to put across a few points that I have been studying to add my “two cents” to the discussion.

The first place to start is to grasp, or try to understand, what “Law” we are referring to. To do this, I will first endeavor to give you some basic points, hopefully put into simplistic language, so that others, who like me, can get a simple view of the basics. The Hebrew Bible is basically divided into three sections: The Law; The Prophets; and the Writings. The section referred to as “The Law” consists of the first 5 books - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This section is known as the *Torah*, or “Teaching,” also referred to as the “Pentateuch” or the “Five Books of Moses.”

The second section is referred to as “The Prophets,” and is divided into two parts. The first part contains, what is referred to as, “the former prophets” where the books of Joshua; Judges; 1 and 2 Samuel (combined as one); 1 and 2 Kings (combined as one) are found. The second part of this section contains what is known as “the latter prophets” (Isaiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel) and the 12 “minor prophets” (Hosea; Joel; Amos; Obadiah; Jonah; Micah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi).

The third section of the Hebrew Scriptures is referred to as “The Writings.” This section contains Psalms; Proverbs; Job; Song of Songs; Ruth; Lamentations; Ecclesiastes; Esther; Daniel; Ezra; Nehemiah; 1 and 2 Chronicles (combined as one).

These three sections combined make up what is known as the “Written Law” commonly referred to as the Tanach(k) which is an acronym from the first Hebrew letter from each section:

Torah (the Pentateuch/ the Law); **N**evi'im (the Prophets); and **K**'tuvim (Writings) = **TaNaKh**.

We also have other Hebrew writings. There is what is known as the “Oral Law of Traditions.” These were ordinances and commandments given by Jewish rabbis and Jewish sages that were orally passed down from generation to generation, including during the time of Jesus, that were finally put into written form sometime in the 2nd century AD, in what is called the “Mishnah.” The Mishnah (Hebrew *mišnāh* meaning - “[teaching by] repetition”) is known to be a book of “interpretations” or in other words, a commentary, of the “written Law,” the Tanakh. It was given orally by these rabbis and sages and then passed down, orally, throughout the history of the Jewish people. There are some that say that the Mishnah contains “other laws that were orally delivered by God to Moses and orally transmitted in unbroken succession to subsequent generations, for the purpose to both illustrate and expand upon the written law. In Jewish thought this “oral law” should be obeyed with equal, if not greater, reverence as the “Written Law.”

We then have another writing that was completed sometime in the 5th century AD known as the “Gemara” (Aramaic *gēmārā* - meaning “completion”) which essentially was a commentary of the Mishnah which was itself a commentary of the “Written Law.” Then finally we have “The Talmud” (Hebrew *talmūd* - meaning “instruction”) which is a book that combines the Mishnah and the Gemara into one.

So what are we to make of all this. Well, obviously during Jesus’ time upon this earth there were only the “Written Law” and there was the “Oral Law” which He referred to as “traditions of men.” The Greek word used in the scriptures for “traditions” is the word “*paradosis*” which means a “giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, i.e. tradition by instruction, narrative, precept, etc.”

One of the difficulties concerning the “issue” within the Body of Christ that I referred to in my opening remarks, I think stems from Jesus’ own words as found in Matthew 5:17-20. It reads as follows: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*

In these scriptures, Jesus makes it very clear that He did not come to destroy or do away with the Law (the “Written Law”). He came to **fulfill** the Law. This is many times thought and expressed to mean that he did away with the Law (the “Written Law”), therefore, we are free from the Law (the “Written Law”) and do not need to worry about obeying the Law (the “Written Law”). I believe this could possibly lead to a misconception of what Jesus may have been stating. If this was the case, then why, in verse 19 would Jesus express the importance of doing, as well as the dangers of breaking or not keeping, the precepts, principles and commands found in the scriptures? In verse 19, He expresses a warning to those who would teach others to neglect obedience to God’s Word, precepts, principles and commands.

It is true and vital for us to understand that in Jesus, the Law (the “Written Law”) was fulfilled and satisfied. By this we mean that when we believe in our heart and accept Jesus for who He is and what He has done, the Father, through Jesus, now looks at the believer as if they have “fulfilled” His Law (the “Written Law”). We now have access to salvation (Eternal Life), through the Blood of Jesus who was the final sacrifice for the atonement of sin and disobedience.

However, that being said, Jesus did not do away with the importance of obeying and following the Father’s commands, precepts and ways found within the scriptures. The Greek word (*plēroō*) used in this passage, translated “fulfill,” means to “consummate” or to bring the Law (the “Written Law”) to its completion or fullness. It is as when a man and woman are married. The marriage is then “consummated,” completed and brought to perfection when the two become one in sexual intimacy. The concept of what “marriage” truly was meant to be is now brought into its “completion,” its fulfillment, by the two who were once living separate lives, now live as and become a totally different entity. They are now one. It was not meant to be a “one-time deal” and after that they can go about their merry way living their own separate lives. No. It is now to be lived and expressed that they are “one” every day of their lives. This is what Jesus was expressing when He said that He has come to “fulfill” the Law, the Written Word of God, not the “traditions of men” as found in the Oral Law. He brought it to its fullness, not its demise.

In the context of this passage of scripture, it infers that the word “fulfill” used in this passage means that Jesus was to express and live His life in God’s will for His children (as made known in the Written Law/Torah) to be **obeyed as it should be**. Jesus’ life was to show us that God’s promises to His children (given through the prophets) **would be received in total fulfillment** as it was intended to be by God for His children as they live out and walk in the ways that are pleasing to Him. In other words, the true “born again, child of God” is to live and walk just as Jesus did. As the Son of the Father, Jesus walked in obedience to His Father by obeying the Father’s commands, precepts and principles. Through Jesus in our lives and in the power of the Holy Spirit that now dwells within us, we as the “sons/children of God,” are to walk in

obedience to the Father's commands, principles and precepts just as Jesus did. Now before some of you get angry with me on this, please read on just a little more and give me a chance to explain what I really mean.

Jesus came to show us what it really means to live this lifestyle that the Law (the "Written Law") was pointing us and directing us to live. He was to be the epitome, the highest example, of the life that God had intended for us to live - and He was.

As we read this in Matthew 5, Jesus was saying that if we follow His example of the Godly lifestyle found in His obedience to God's Word, that we would also, just as He did, receive the fullness of God's promises that are found in His Word. In the context of Matthew 5, this takes us back to the beginning of Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" and the "beatitudes/ blessings" as found in Matthew 5:3-11.

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus admonished the Pharisees and other religious leaders. *"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."*

The Pharisees' and scribes' obedience to the Word of God came from the wrong motivations. They were doing and teaching the Law (the "Written Law") as well as their "traditions of men" (the Oral law) as a way of working one's way into relationship with God and thereby, possibly, entering into God's "good graces." They also, as expressed in other scriptures and warnings by Jesus, began to place more of an emphasis on the "Oral Law/ the traditions of men" than the written Word of God given to Moses by God's own hand. In Jewish thought, a rabbi was given a great deal of respect and was thought to be "one who would speak as the authority of God." Or in other words, be the "mouthpiece of God, Himself." This became dangerous, because that is where they started to interpret in their own understanding the Written Law and began to continually add to the Oral Law. That is why Jesus referred to the Oral Law as the "traditions of men."

As a side observation, unfortunately, too many times, we can see that this is what happens within the Body of Christ. Maybe, just maybe, well meaning leaders and preachers have done the exact same thing and have brought more bondage on the Body of Christ, just as the well meaning rabbis did to the Jewish people. They interpret the Word for others instead of encouraging the Body of Christ to seek after and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal and illuminate the Word to each believer. The blame does not only fall on the leadership but it falls on the Body of Christ as well for being lazy and complacent about seeking after God's Word and His Truth, which would then allow that truth to truly encounter and change the believer's heart.

Getting back to our discussion, Jesus was saying that we are to follow His example and that our obedience to the Word of God should be done out of love and adoration unto our God as acts of worship that come from a heart that wants to "bless the heart of our King." It is now possible, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit within, to live this Godly lifestyle of desiring to keep God's Word and living a lifestyle of moral excellence because we have started this journey by first becoming "poor in spirit," "mourning" over our sin, etc... We are now able to do this because of the Holy Spirit within and in the power of His might, not our own. The attitude of my heart is to live my life as an act of worship unto Him - in all I do, 24 hours/7days per week.

When we make Jesus our personal Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes into us and regenerates our "dead spirit" (that was dead to a relationship with God) and we are "born from above" (born again.) It is the Holy Spirit within us. The same Holy Spirit that came and empowered Jesus (when Jesus was baptized - Matthew 3:16, 17) to do His ministry here on this earth empowers us to live this Christ-like lifestyle.

Right after Jesus tells us concerning the purpose of why He came in respect to the Law (the "Written Law"). He stated that He was the living example of what fulfilling and obedience to the Law was. He completed the Law. He did not do away with the Law, otherwise why would He go into some clarifications in the intent of these certain Laws? (Matthew 5:21-48)

Jesus wanted to express that it wasn't the "letter of the Law" that God was asking us to obey but rather the intentions of the Law (the "Written Law") which was to lead us into places of blessings. The scribes and Pharisees had taken the Law (the "Written Law") from what it was meant to be, a guide and schoolmaster

in teaching us what is pleasing to God, and made it into a set of rules leading to spiritual bondage. They added to that bondage with even more “traditions,” the Oral Law.

I believe it takes us back to another passage of scripture where Jesus simplifies the whole matter. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus states - “... *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*”

I believe we need to look at obedience to God’s Word, His precepts and principles, not so much as a way of working and earning to receive more of God’s love. Nor should it be with an attitude that wants to “show” God how much we love Him. This creates an attitude of bondage. Rather, obedience to His ways should be thought of as a “natural” outflow that comes from a changed heart because of our renewed born again spirit. It flows from a heart that truly understands what has been done for each of us, freely, by such a wonderful, gracious, merciful and loving “Abba.” The attitude of my heart is not one that thinks “I must obey or else,” but rather it is one that delights and obeys because my desire is to just “bless the heart of my King.” Obedience has nothing to do with me or what I might receive from that obedience but rather it is all about a “heart condition” that wants to live a life that is pleasing to God and blesses Him more than myself. It is pleasing to God because it is the life that He desired, from the beginning, for His people to experience.

As we delight the heart of our King with this “attitude of heart” the automatic outflow of that will be that we will delight in loving others because that delights the heart of God. One of our expressions of loving God will be the loving of others. If we get the first one (loving God) right the second (loving others) will be a lot easier and it will flow in such a way that it will cause others to be envious of what the child of God has. That is the definition of the term “*blessed.*” The term “*blessed*” as used in the scriptures means - “happy, joyful, spiritually prosperous, to the point of being envied by others.” The love that emanates from us should cause others to be envious of what we have and bring them to a place that wants what we have - a love relationship with the Father and the “Lover of our soul,” Jesus. This love is expressed in a changed life that obeys the Word of God out of love, not out of bondage.

Do we mess up and disobey? Of course we do. That is why in 1John 1:8, the writer states that if we say we do not sin that we are in error (“*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*”). However, that does not give us an open door to just sin. Neither does God’s grace and mercy give us an open door to sin. 1John 1:9 is given because when we do mess up we can immediately, “...*confess our sins, (and) he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”

And this is how we may discern [daily, by experience] that we are coming to know Him [to perceive, recognize, understand, and become better acquainted with Him]: if we keep (bear in mind, observe, practice) His teachings (precepts, commandments). Whoever says, I know Him [I perceive, recognize, understand, and am acquainted with Him] but fails to keep {and} obey His commandments (teachings) is a liar, and the Truth [of the Gospel] is not in him. But he who keeps (treasures) His Word [who bears in mind His precepts, who observes His message in its entirety], truly in him has the love of {and} for God been perfected (completed, reached maturity). By this we may perceive (know, recognize, and be sure) that we are in Him: Whoever says he abides in Him ought [as a personal debt] to walk {and} conduct himself in the same way in which He walked {and} conducted Himself. - 1John 2:3-6(Amplified Version)

I am well aware that there is much more that can be and needs to be discussed on this issue. But for now we will conclude our discussion.

And that is my “two cents” on the matter.

[Some of you might think that this discussion is not even worth “two cents.” However, please, remember the second great commandment and love me anyway. ☺]