
The Practice in the New Covenant: Part 2

Galatians 2:20; 5:6¹¹

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Introduction

All through the history of the church, preachers, teachers and charlatans have offered the “key” to Christian living.

Historically, that has been some insight that gave in-the-know Christians an inside track on holiness. If you have this “key” you will finally be able to overcome sin. While many of these keys ranged from helpful insights into the Scriptures to bizarre interpretations of obscure texts, they at least recognized that our main problem is the struggle with sin. It sought to be a purity gospel.

In the last century, that concern shifted in twisted and terrible way. The new “keys” to Christian living became about becoming healthy, rich and successful. The measure of a successful Christian life was no longer about godliness but gain. The keys led you, not to the deeper Christian life, but to the healthy, wealthy Christian life. It has become the prosperity gospel.

Now we are inundated with the “keys” to Christian living that all about spiritual powers. These basically turn Christians into demi-gods. We are not just like God; we are mini-deities. We can speak things into existence, transport from place, heal every disease, and so on. These “keys” to the Christian life are not about holiness, but about powerfulness. They are not about overcoming the sin that remains, but the limitations of living in the world, in fallenness and even in being human. It has become the power gospel.

We do not want to fall into offering a “secret” key that gives you something no one else has. We do not want to offer new or novel understanding of the Bible. We are not guaranteeing purity, prosperity or power. We do believe that these are the clear, simple, plain teaching of the Apostles given to us in the Scriptures. These truths are simple to say and to believe. Thank God for that. But they are also profound and practical. It is our prayer that you will believe what God says so that these truths will function the way God designed them to.

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Here is the essence of the Christian life in the New Covenant. We have the Word of God and the Spirit of God so that we are pleasing to God by believing God in an obeying way.

God has given us a new heart, a new inner person with the capacity to be pleasing to Him.

God has placed His Word in our hearts by giving us the Scripture so that we have what is to be believed in an obeying way with growing understanding.

God has placed His life in our hearts by giving us the Spirit so that we have the life of God in our souls and the love of God poured out in our hearts.

All truth affects living. What you believe determines how you behave and what you feel. It drives your actions and affections. You respond to life around you *according to what you believe about God, yourself and life itself.*

I have three aims for us today: to correct misrepresentations, to confirm these truths and to challenge you to walk in these truths by example and by encouragement.

Correcting Misrepresentations

There are those who object to what we believe and teach. It is often difficult to deal with those objections because they are grounded in misunderstandings and misrepresentations of what we believe. I want to help you to be clear in your own mind as to what we are actually saying so that you will be able to embrace it and to Biblically defend it. I want to do this in the form of giving you some affirmations and denials.

1. Some say that we teach that there is no Law for the believer; by this, they mean that we teach there are no commands for the believer to obey.
 - We affirm that the truths and the commands of the New Testament are to be believed and obeyed.
 1. We deny that obedience will come without the commands being taught or emphasized.
 2. We deny that there are no or very few commands in the New Testament for the believer.
2. Some say that we teach that it is not necessary to teach the commands of the Bible because people will naturally please God and walk in the Spirit if they know the objective truths of the Bible.
 - We affirm that the truths and commands of the New Testament are to be taught, preached, exhorted and where disbelieved and disobeyed, to be admonished, corrected, repented and if necessary, disciplined.
 1. We deny that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer makes the preaching of the commands unnecessary.
 2. We deny that if a person simply knows the truths of the Bible that they will simply do what pleases God without reference to the commands of the Bible.

3. Some say that we teach that since the Christian is not under even the Ten Commandments and therefore we can disobey them and be lawless. This is a much more complex issue to answer. It requires multiple affirmations.
- We affirm that the unbeliever is under Law of God in the Bible and in the conscience and therefore is subject to its condemnation and judgment.
 1. We deny that the believer is under the rule of legislation.
 2. We deny that the believer is under the Mosaic Law in its entirety.
 - We affirm that the Christian is to be pleasing to God and to obey God in the commands of the New Testament and the wisdom of the Bible.
 1. We deny that nothing is sin to a believer.
 2. We deny that a Christian is free to live a life of sin.
 - We affirm that godliness is empowered by faith through the indwelling of the Word and Spirit to produce Christlikeness.
 1. We deny that godliness is defined by the Law.
 2. We deny that godliness is empowered for obedience to the Law.
 - We affirm that godliness is produced by the Spirit and the Word in the heart of the believer producing the obedience of faith, good works, the fruit of the Spirit, manifestations of the Spirit including spiritual gifts and graces and all else that is the effect of the life of God in the soul of the believer.
 1. We deny that rules and legislation are effective means to overcome the flesh and to cause godly living.
 2. We deny that Law can overcome the flesh and cause godly living.
 3. We deny that human traditions, worldly philosophies and psychologies can overcome the flesh and cause godly living.

Now let's think about an illustration that may help us in reference to the Ten Commandments

Let's think about "not disobey or obey"...

People want to make the issue whether or not we are bound to obey or are freed from obeying the Ten Commandments

What they are not hearing is when we say the believer is "not under the Law"

This is the wrong question. It already assumes that the relationship of the believer to the Law is a matter of obedience. The Bible does not treat it that way. The Bible says that since we are in Christ we are not under Law but are under grace. The Law still exists and is in force for unbelievers. But not believers.

Think about it this way,

The best way I know how to illustrate this is as follows. We have lived both here in America and in Germany. When we lived in Germany, we under German Law. We were subject to its legislation. But now, we live in America. We are not subject to German law. We have moved from the place, realm,

country to a different realm, place or country. People who live in Germany can disobey German law. I cannot. I am not under German law. I live in America. (Now the Analogy breaks down because here I am under American law. The Christian is not under Law at all, but is under grace.)

Christ has fully kept the Law for us. In Christ, we are seen as being perfectly righteous because of Christ's obedience. The demands and the penalties of the Law have been satisfied. Now we are under grace. Now we are in the New Covenant, Therefore, we have the Word of God and the Spirit of God so that the Christian life is about faith working by love. Christian living is not about lists; it is about life.

Christian Living in the New Covenant

So how do we work all this out? You are living the Christian life in the midst of the mess. How does this actually affect you each moment of the day?

Not dependence on works, but believing God in an obeying way

Rules don't work

Colossians 2:20–3:4

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)— according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Religion and rules will not deal with the flesh. The flesh is a deeply ingrained habit of trying to be god instead of submitting to and walking in and according to the Spirit.

Law doesn't work

Romans 8:1–4

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The Law as legislation cannot cause the righteousness it commands. But the Spirit who is life does cause the righteousness Christ has already given. This is accomplished by the death of the flesh and the power of the Spirit's life in us.

Walking by faith produces obedience.

Believing God's Word is the essence of walking by faith. Faith is not some positive mental power that gets positive results in life. Faith believes God's Word in the Lord's principles, promises and precepts.

Believing truths renews our minds. As we learn and believe the Word, our minds are being renewed so that we think in a way that is pleasing to God. This equips us to walk in God's will and wisdom.

Believing commands produces obedience. As we learn and believe God's commands, we grow in doing good works in the sense of obedience. We accept God's providential will and walk with Him according to His will.

Walking by the Spirit produces fruit.

As we have already seen, among other things, the Spirit in us produces its fruit. There is a sample list of these virtues in Galatians 5:22-23. Listen to some of the context and then the verses themselves. **Galatians 5:16-25**

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Making application to the Christian life

Categories to wrestle with

Here are some questions that we tend to struggle with:

1. How is this related to our understanding of the heart?
2. How does this affect what the Bible clearly calls sin? Think in terms of the sin lists in the New Testament...
3. How then do we make decisions in life about school, vocation, place to live, spouse, children...
4. How then does discipleship work in the Christian life?
5. How does this affect what we expect and do in Biblical Counseling?

The Will of God and the Wisdom of God

Not all decisions are moral decisions. Most of the decisions Christians make are not seeking to be conformed to God's will. Sometimes, it is. There is the temptation to do what God forbids or to not do what God requires. This is what the will of God is about. The will of God are those things that He has clearly revealed as being right or wrong.

We also make many, many decisions that are inside the will of God but require wisdom. We must choose what is best among all that God allows. This freedom to walk in wisdom is often very difficult for Christians. Rules will not serve to help us choose the exact right decision. Most of you did not have to think about whether the clothes you wore today were pleasing to the Lord. But you did a wisdom decision as you choose what to put on. It is living within all that God allows, knowing what then requires and being able to think wisely that makes the Christian life the challenge and joy that it is.

Now, it is important that we recognize the struggle against sin. Sin is not only a choice of actions, but also a kind of attitude. It is a mindset – it can be the way one thinks. This is the mind of the flesh versus the mind of the Spirit. Both of these will have huge influence in your decision making in regards to the will of God and the wisdom of God.

Illustrated situations

Many of you are wondering what difference this makes? How does it affect the way I deal with sin or make practical decisions?

Many of you are already functioning this way. This is not something new to you. It is how you deal with sin and make wisdom decisions. Hopefully it has helped you to grow in your understanding of it and to connect it to our thinking about the New Covenant.

Many of you function this way without knowing why. You have rejected Law living and are seeking to be pleasing to God in holiness and liberty. This last few weeks have had a "oh, that's it" for you.

Some of you this is all new. You have heard of these things but have never been challenged to live by them. So it is not clear what difference this makes.

So, let's work through the following situations and think about the difference. Part of the difference will be whether you are dealing with a moral decision which involves

obeying God's will or making a wisdom decision about things you are free to make equal choices.

Situation 1: Doing the will of God... "Doing the will of God from the heart..."

You have a friend who has written you a very ugly email that is a reaction to a careless word and then deed. You are becoming angry. You have to deal with how you feel and what you want to do. How will you?

Situation 2: Doing what is best in God's wisdom... "If any of you lack wisdom..."

You have an opportunity to change jobs (yes, I know this is close to home.). You will have to move to another city. Assuming that the work is not forbidden by the Word of God, how do you decide?

With these two situations in mind, think about the difference in how you respond to these situations.

Handled by legislation

What are the rules that govern this situation..

What verse applies to this situation...

Tell me what to do...

But the Bible doesn't cover this...

Handled by faith working through love

What principles or Biblical truths?

What precepts or Biblical commands?

What priorities or Biblical urgencies?

What people or Biblical relationships?

What purposes or Biblical goals?

What patterns or Biblical examples?

What practice or Biblical traditions?

What personal or heart issues?

Reflect and Respond

What God calls us to is a walk with Him, a life with Him, a relationship with Him. God has made us to fellowship with Him in all He is for all we are. From beginning to end and forever God has purposed and provided that His people – you and I – can be with Him and He with us. The New Covenant has transformed us for a living relationship with Him. This is why it is about faith working in love.

My wife and I have been married for 38 years. We were married under the law in the state of Washington. The law says we are married. The law forbids me to hit or harm her. The law requires me to provide for her. But not once ever have I consciously looked to the law to tell me how to relate to her.

My wife and I have been married for 38 years. We were married in faith and love to one another. We have a covenant and a companionship with one another. We complement and complete one another. We love each other and so we believe, trust and seek to please one another. We have a life together. We talk, laugh, work, play, hurt, take care of, protect and try to please one another. We believe God's truths and commands and we work them out in our relationship in the sphere of love.

This is how we walk with God. This is what it means to say, "I am a Christian." It means to that we walk with God, not according to Law, but according to Life. This is why He has given us new hearts, His Word and His life by His Spirit.

May God grant that we will be transformed by faith working through love.