

# A Series on Christian Behavior

## Introduction

*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

*Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;*

*just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.*

*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.<sup>1</sup>*

Let's bow before our God and pray. Father we ask now that you would open this text to us this morning and in the weeks ahead. We ask that you would continue to bring us together as your church and that you would address us and instruct us in the Gospel of your son and in the lives you have called us to live. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

And so I will introduce a series on Christian behavior. As I examine my own life, my own heart, that of my family and of this congregation, I have an increasing sense of a burden regarding this passage. Our purpose in this pulpit is to proclaim Christ and it is my hope that you are assured when that Gospel is proclaimed. Over the last weeks and the last months that Gospel was proclaimed from Ezekiel and Isaiah and there is hope and comfort given by God in that Gospel. That same hope and comfort are found in Jesus Christ and in what he accomplished for you as well as what he continues to accomplish for you as the risen ascended savior. Great assurance, hope and comfort are proclaimed Lords Day after Lords Day.

But questions do arise as I consider my life, my children and now their children's lives. Questions arise as I consider this congregation and in the many pastoral burdens that are here. In the reading of this scripture we hear imperatives given by Paul and questions arise,

"How do we live in the light of that grace?"

"How do we live in the light of that comfort?"

"How does that grace affect our thoughts, words and attitudes?"

"How do we conduct our lives in the light of that real and sure hope that is ours in Jesus Christ?"

"How do we live out our lives as a Christian?"

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<sup>1</sup> *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update.* (1995). (1 Co 10:31–11:1). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Our behavior towards God, toward ourselves and our behavior towards others is an important topic. In all of Scripture God addresses you as His covenant people. Old Testament or New Testament, in all of God's Word, God addresses you in Spirit in regards to your behavior as His covenant people. He tells Israel that by His power and His compassion, by His mercy and love He has redeemed them, delivered them, *saved them* from the bondage of Egypt. Then on the basis of that love, that deliverance, that salvation, He reveals the Ten Commandments as we refer to them. They are His words telling us how we might live in regards to our relationship with God and then how we might live in relationship with one another.

*"You shall have no other Gods before me."*

*"You shall not make for yourself an idol."*

*"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain and use it futilely."*

*"Remember the Sabbath day."*

*"Honor your father and your mother."*

*"Do not murder."*

*"Do not commit adultery."*

*"Do not steal."*

*"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."*

*"You shall not covet"*

With these words believers are to live in the light of His grace and in the light of His deliverance. In his mercy and compassion God is constituting a new people on earth. Now then, how do we live as His people?

Old Testament or New Testament, "Be holy for I am holy says your God". That most certainly must have implications for our thoughts, words and attitudes. "Be holy for I am holy says your Lord." That must have implications for our behavior. The same is found in our Confession and in our catechism.

*What do the scriptures principally teach?*

*The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. (2 Tim. 1:13, 2 Tim. 3:16)<sup>2</sup>*

In Scripture, the Greek "k" root words for proclaiming<sup>3</sup> appear. Here is the proclamation of the Gospel. The Kingdom of God has come and God has saved you. Quite apart from you, God has graciously saved

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<sup>2</sup> *The Westminster shorter catechism: with Scripture proofs.* (1996). (3rd edition.). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> **καταγγέλλω** (katangellō), *proclaim, announce*. Cognate words: ἀγγελία, ἀγγέλλω, ἄγγελος, ἀναγγέλλω, ἀπαγγέλλω, ἀρχάγγελος, διαγγέλλω, ἐξαγγέλλω, ἰσαγγέλος, καταγγελεύς, παραγγελία, παραγγέλλω, προκαταγγέλλω

you by the proclamation of the Gospel. But *then* there is the didache<sup>4</sup>, *the teaching*. Again, in light of that grace and salvation the “*How do we live*”? We pastors and teachers rightly tend to emphasize the ‘k roots’. Well, with this New Year we are going to do a lot more with the didache.

There is a danger in *teaching* ‘how to live’. There is the danger that we might be accused of legalism<sup>5</sup>. But I hope to correct that, even in this simple introduction but more so in the weeks that lie ahead. It is not legalism, not moralism and certainly not Phariseeism. It is a new life and a new creation in *Jesus Christ*. So the question becomes “How does the nature of this new life, this new creation, express itself?” and the answer is simply that it is seen in our behavior. The Christian faith is things to be believed and professed, yes. But also it is a life to be lived. We are called not just to talk the talk but also to *walk* the talk.

In a popular saying, a question really, that has been resurrected from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century comes to mind. “*What would Jesus do?*” That is a fair question. There *is* an element of imitation in the text. We will cover that further down this road we have stepped onto. But the better question which must be understood is “What *has* Jesus accomplished? What does Jesus direct us to do in the light of that accomplishment, that salvation? What does He direct us to do after pouring his life out in sacrifice, giving Himself to His father, dying, lying in the grave? After His resurrection, ascension and giving of the Holy Spirit, what does He *direct* us to do? How do we bear fruit for Him? How does that knowledge transform our lives, our families, our congregation and our church? Much better questions there, yes?

We will seek the answers to these questions and others with the understanding that Christianity is based on a historical fact. It is predicated on a historical event and based on a historical fact that God has acted in Jesus Christ to bring about a new creation, the Christian life that includes our morality and our behavior. Christian behavior is not a bunch of rules that might impede your freedom or a standard to be kept in order to merit or earn something from God. We know that. It is not a way to keep score of whether we are naughty or nice or a way to get to heaven. Christian behavior, God’s Word, His law, his commandments ; all those categories and their attendant dimensions are not meant as some sterile

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**33.204 (21)** *to proclaim* Ac 3:24; 4:2; 13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17, 21; 17:3, 13, 23; 26:23; Rom 1:8; 1 Co 2:1; 9:14; 11:26; Php 1:17, 18; Col 1:28; *IPhld* 5.2; 9:2; *Poly* 1.2 (2011). *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Logos Bible Software.

<sup>4</sup> **διδασχῆ** (didachē), *a teaching*. Cognate words: διδακτικός, διδακτός, διδασκαλία, διδάσκαλος, διδάσκω, ἑτεροδιδασκαλέω, θεοδίδακτος, καλοδιδάσκαλος, νομοδιδάσκαλος, ψευδοδιδάσκαλος

**33.224 (30)** *teaching* Mk 1:22; 11:18; 12:38; Lk 4:32; Ac 2:42; Rom 6:17; 1 Co 14:6, 26; 2 Ti 4:2; Tt 1:9; Heb 6:2; *IMag* 6.2; *Did, Salutation*; 1:3; 2:1; 6:1; *Barn* 9.9; 16:9; 18:1 (2); *Herm, M VI, ii, 7*; *doctrine* Mk 1:27; 4:2; Ro 16:17; 2 John 9 (2), 10; Rev 2:14, 15, 24

**33.236 (14)** *teaching* Mt 7:28; 16:12; 22:33; Jn 7:16, 17; Ac 5:28; 13:12; 17:19; *doctrine* Jn 18:19; Heb 13:9; *IEph* 9.1; *Did* 11.2; *Herm, S VIII, vi, 5 (2) Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> **8774**

#### **legalism**

The belief that salvation demands or depends upon total obedience to the letter of the law. Examples of legalism include an excessive concern for minute details of the law coupled with a neglect of its fundamental concerns, and a preoccupation with human legal traditions. Manser, M. H. (2009). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.

standard that we have to somehow conform to in order to assuage our conscience. We are not to, in some weary way, live out our lives until we are with Christ.

Scripture says it is by grace you are saved, *by grace*. Take comfort, you have been saved. And not of yourselves have you been saved. This salvation is a gift a God and not of works that anyone should boast. It is my hope that all of you who sit in front of this pulpit regularly are assured of that. The heart of the Gospel is this: We cannot possibly save ourselves or merit anything from God. We are a cursed race not deserving anything from God no matter how hard we try to please Him. We are marked by depravity. There is a complete inability on our part to be good according to any actual standard. That sounds like bad news doesn't it? Well, it is bad news. But there is good news. We are fully and freely forgiven by virtue of God's grace, compassion and love. He looks upon us, and he sees us in an estate where we are unable and unwilling to turn from that which really is destroying us in this life and the life to come. He looks upon us and with grace, compassion and love and He saves us from ourselves, from our sin and from our depravity. He does this freely, powerfully. He saves, redeems and reconciles *you*. That is really good news, yes?

Let me ask you yet another question. Is His saving purpose only to forgive you of your sin and to get you to heaven? <sup>1</sup> God's saving purpose has a universal range and a cosmic scope. God wants to save you, yes. He wants to redeem you and bring you into heaven, yes. But what is His overarching purpose in doing so? His heart of hearts is not *just* to save you, but to save the creation by bringing about a new creation. It's just not *about* you, it's really about Him and what He has created and what He wants to make new again. This new creation is not just a renovation. When you renovate a house you make it nice. But God is not trying to make *nice* people, He is making new people. He is tearing down the old and building new.

C.S. Lewis illustrates this point in saying the Christian life is not like trying to train a horse to run faster or jump higher. The Christian life is rather like creating a whole new animal. It is like a horse but this horse has wings. God is creating anew. This new horse soars and that makes worrying about running and jumping irrelevant. We are living in a 'now but not yet' age when we will soar one day, that is real but the place where wings will sprout is only starting to develop. There are just some bumps and maybe on some others perhaps knobs that surely one day will be wings, but not yet. We are then a bit out of sync with the world. We are a little strange and clumsy. We are that new creation that one day will soar, but not yet. A transformation is taking place. You were sons and daughters of Adam and now you are sons and daughters of God. Now live accordingly. You were part of the old creation but now are part of the new creation. Live accordingly. You were citizens of the kingdom of darkness but now are citizens of the kingdom of God. Live accordingly.

Christian behavior is not based on a list of rules. It is not a mere morality. It certainly is not a dead religion. It is not just showing up on Sunday and somehow being inspired emotionally for the rest of the week and it's not just fulfilling some tradition or formality. It is none of that. If it is, really, we should all go home because I don't want to waste my time and I wouldn't want to waste your time. If that were so, I would be a fool up here in this pulpit addressing you. I often tell people I don't want to be a liberal Christian or a nominal Christian. I know that sounds heretical but that would be foolish and futile. I would rather be an existentialist or a Marxist than either of those. It is not just about showing up on Sunday and if it is like that for you then I really feel bad for you. Go spend your time more profitably doing something else.

But if you know the power of God, if you behold Christ, if you love Him and He has changed your life and you are beginning to soar, then you know the new creation. Yes, you struggle with the old and you live within that intersection of the two ages but there is that delight. There is that freedom and that liberty. There is that joy. You *are* a changed creature. You *are* a new creation and part of a cosmic transformation that God is doing in his redemptive purposes. Then come, worship, be renewed. Be reminded and be nourished. Acknowledge your God and what he is doing in your life and throughout the universe. Come. You can't do anything but if you are a new creation. If you are not, I feel bad for you. The dark and dead world is a pig's trough and if it makes you happy, wallow there. But here, in the new creation there is light and life, true fruit sweet wine and a loving God.

On account of all that we are going to be criticized by the world. Read the literature and you are told this is just the way you were raised and continuing on believing this is really just naïve. Even more pernicious is the therapeutic milieu where all we are saying and doing is really just a defensive mechanism. This view says life is hard and in defense we project a loving savior who comforts us by being the all-powerful creature we want to be ourselves. In reality it our faith is just the mind trying to comfort itself. Isn't that kind of empathy condescending? The problem with that view is the argument collapses. Using one part of a fallen creation as a lens to understand all the other parts of the same fallen creation is idolatrous and illogical. Couldn't it just as well be that the therapeutic milieu is a trick of the mind to escape a holy and righteous God that is really there and that everyone knows really exists?

Now I know I haven't even looked at the text yet so maybe I shouldn't go on and on, eh?

The question is "How do we live as new creatures (which we are, in Christ) in a new creation (which we have in Christ)?" There are three imperatives in the text; glorify God, benefit our neighbor and imitate Christ. We will unpack these imperatives in the coming weeks but let me make this one point on which we can meditate. Look at the relationship between myself and everything else in the world. I must consider God. It is not about my status, recognition and self-esteem in life. That status is measured in the world by my education and my wealth and which neighborhood and car I buy. Our lives don't start there in the new creation. In the new creation it is about His status and His recognition and glory. It is about me honoring Him. Regarding our neighbor in the new creation, we don't cause him to stumble. Using the Christian liberty that I have, how am I relating to my neighbor for his good and for his benefit? Christian behavior is in some sense about forgetting about ourselves, honoring God and benefiting our neighbor. We are to be conformed into an image of Christ. That is something outside of me. It is not in my imagination of what Jesus might do if he had my temptations and struggles. Jesus does not comfort and love in our imaginations. That is not what the New Testament teaches. He has ascended and is at the right hand of God. In some sense, spiritually, He is in you but He is separate and you look to Him and follow Him. Jesus said, "Take up my cross and follow me." Your identity is not found in the imperial self. Looking away to Christ is the start of seeing who Christ *is* so that you can *follow* Him. This is Christian Behavior 101. This is nothing new to you. I recognize that. But this is what the scripture teaches. There is more that we will unpack but we must start here.

[Christopher Lasch](#) wrote a book called *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. Whether or not you buy into his presupposition that culture has a force that is shaping you as families and individuals and this American culture is shaping you in such a way that you develop narcissist tendencies, it is a well-researched book. This unhealthy tendency towards self lends you to seeing yourself in everything in the world. Everything really becomes about you. You project your own

feelings and thoughts into your friends and families. In religion then, a narcissist sees himself when looking at God. That is a real danger. You don't have to buy into all Lasch's psychological ideas to see that it is dangerous to see everything in your world as a reflection of yourself. Images we see reinforce this. Our interpretation of images is easier to distort than texts and we are living in an image driven culture. When we were in Europe we saw much iconic art that really shaped western civilization. We saw DaVinci and Michelangelo works with hundreds of people crowding around them. The majority of the people were quite rude pushing and trying to get closer to the images and then taking a selfie. It is as if they are thinking "Now instead of David there is David and *me!*" I am not getting down on that as some sort of immorality but the danger is this. They struggle hard to get the picture and then walk away. They never really view the art which was created by genius in order to transform you. Art is a general gift of God. It can transform you if you forget yourself and receive the beauty, the composition of line and color. You can see and be transformed by what civilization has said "*YES!*" to. In forgetting yourself, you can be transformed by the thing you are now able to receive.

In a greater sense then can you not see that by forgetting yourself you are not projecting yourself onto God but instead receiving and being transformed by His glory, benefitting your neighbor and more and more able to be an imitation of Christ. Here is where Christian behavior begins and where it can be seen that it is not about a bunch of do's and don'ts. It is not to rob you of a good time but to transform you and make you more like God. The problem in religion is that we want a selfie of Jesus and *me* and then we walk away from God. That is so dangerous. Look away from yourself.

You are a new creation in Jesus Christ. Live accordingly.<sup>ii</sup>

*This text is an edited transcript of a sermon preached on January 4<sup>th</sup> 2015 at Grace Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Columbus Oh. The pastor is Reverend William Kessler. Editing was performed by members of the congregation at the request of the church's Committee on Christian Education (CoCE) for the edification of the members of the church. Should God use this text for your edification as well it is to His glory. Permission to redistribute this text in any manner can be requested by contacting the CoCE at [coce.grace.opc@gmail.com](mailto:coce.grace.opc@gmail.com)*

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<sup>i</sup> Line 100 = 00:14:25

<sup>ii</sup> Line 187 = 00:36:48