

How true this is, and how wonderful! And this is again the blessed Christian gospel message. The key to living in Christian obedience is abiding in Christ, always relying upon Him, and asking for the Spirit to work in us both to will and to do all God's commandments. We have the pledge of the Lord also from John 14, that this is exactly what God delights to do too, not only to save sinners through Christ but also to make sinners conformable to the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit and through His holy Word.

As you call on the Lord so to lead you in this new year, He will in His mercy and love for Jesus' sake, also through the Word, more and more convict of sin and guide in all the truth, and work with sanctifying power, that more and more we turn from sin and live to His praise. He works that the growing Christian sins less but sees his sins and sinfulness more and more. The closer we come to the Lord in true love, the more we see still our remaining ungodliness and the fight against sin thus continues till our very last breath. But, praise God, it is never in our own strength that we are called to fight. Which Christian doesn't discover painfully and repeatedly, "Without Christ we can do nothing." How wonderful is the gospel then that without Christ we need not do anything! Oh, the gospel is so liberating. The God of the Ten Commandments is the God Who introduces the law as the God of salvation, the God Who says, "I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." And Paul writes in II Corinthians 3:17, "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." True love to God is about Christian obedience to God's law, that is, obedience which is willing obedience, thankful obedience, and trusting obedience. Is it what you will be about by God's grace this year and in all your life? Even so, and so alone, truly, from God's perspective, "Happy New Year!" Amen.

Hans Overduin, Radio Pastor
January 1, 2006

Publication No.239

BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



WHAT CHRISTIAN LOVE IS ABOUT

On this first Sunday of the New Year, we have before us the subject of Christian love to God and how that shows itself in everyday life. In John 14:15, Jesus states, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." The theme for this message is, "What Christian love to God is about!" Notice with me it is all about Christian obedience to God's commandments.

True love to God is about Christian obedience to God's Word and will. It is striking how emphatic Jesus is about this point. Just in a space of ten verses in John 14, Jesus repeats this theme over and over. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments", Jesus says in verse 15. Then in verse 21 we read, "He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me." And verse 23 again, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words." And verse 24, "He that loves Me not keeps not My sayings." Go on to chapter 15 and notice there again Jesus saying the same. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love." [vs.10] "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." [vs.14]

The point is clear that Christian love is about Christian obedience to God. Christian love, in other words, is not just some warm feeling, some vague idea, or some dead belief, but it shows itself in doing the will of God, especially also in keeping His commandments and all His Word. The Bible teaches very clearly when someone is truly saved by grace trusting in Jesus as His Saviour and Lord, it does result and show and must also come out in Christian obedience to God's law and will.

I emphasize **Christian** obedience. Let me explain. Christian obedience is not unwilling obedience, but willing obedience. It is what the true believer desires above all, to live in submission to all God's law in every detail seeking to live according to what it forbids and what it commands. This is the Christian's desire because the true believer has a new heart, being born again of the Spirit. Thus a true believer can no longer live in sin. A true believer begins to hate sin and to hate the paths of evil more and more, and he or she longs to be holy as God is holy. This is not a matter of bondage in the sense of having to do something against your will, but it is a matter of longing to do what you know is right, and fighting all that may resist this, especially also that old nature still within us and all the temptations from this world and the devil. Christian obedience to God's law is not something the believer goes about grudgingly, but gladly. The true believer

agrees with the apostle John in what he writes in 1 John 5:3, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.”*

For the Christian it is the way of sin that is burdensome and grievous, but not God’s law. Indeed, for the Christian, the way of disobedience, also as still can be so often in our own lives, becomes such a sorrow and such a drag, and daily you repent of sin, confessing before God truly, “I don’t want to go this way, Lord, forgive me my sin, and cleanse me and purify me against all sin and sinning.” In a real sense sin becomes unnatural to you and when you still fail and falter, you come to God with those words of Paul from Romans 7 in holy desire for change, ‘Lord, help me against sin, *“for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do!”* Yes, all too often still, Lord, and I don’t want that’, for as he says in verse 22, *“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.”*

Do you understand this point, my friends? Christian obedience to God’s law is not unwilling obedience but willing obedience, something you most desire and pray for and pursue. Do you know this mark of Christian obedience to God’s law? Is God’s law a delight to you and sin also a grief for you? Do you long to be genuinely obedient not only to all that God forbids us, but also all that He rightly demands from us? Is the way of holiness precious to you, and something you wish to progress and persevere in? For a true Christian the least sin becomes a grief to you, and transgression against God’s law is not something you can just accept and tolerate as normal, but you bring it to God and call out to Him for His saving and renewing power in Christ Jesus and through His Spirit and Word. Does this all sound strange to you, or do you say, “No, pastor, you are right, and that is how it is in my life too, by God’s grace”?

What is Christian love to God about? It is about Christian obedience to God’s law. Another mark of Christian obedience is that it is thankful obedience. Christian obedience, as God calls for it, is never a matter of us earning God’s favour by our obedience, but it is in gratitude to God for all His mercies and His full and free salvation for us in and through Christ Jesus, the Saviour of sinners. Praise God none of us have to live in Christian obedience to get right with God because we could never be right with God then! Every true Christian realizes the truth that even the holiest of people here on earth has “only a small beginning of that obedience” that God justly expects from us. Our best works here on earth are still always stained with sin somehow. But we are not called to Christian obedience to gain God’s favor but to live in thanksgiving for all His favour so rich and gracious and eternal, all for Jesus’ sake alone.

It is such a comfort for the believer that Jesus Christ not only paid the punishment for sin we deserve, but also He already lived the perfect life on His people’s behalf that God requires from us for our salvation. You don’t have to live holily for God to accept you and approve of you. That is already

done for us in and through Christ Jesus. Do you see how this gospel truth takes away the burden and bondage of living the Christian life? The Christian life of obedience to the law of God is a matter of thanksgiving for salvation, and not a working towards salvation. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and being saved, God’s people by grace live on in Christian obedience most willing to obey all God’s law, and living in thankful obedience before Him for all His salvation so grand, so gracious, so good, so guaranteed, in and through Jesus’ Person and work.

Do you understand this part of the Christian gospel, dear friends? Or are some of you thinking still, and under the delusion yet, that somehow you have to earn God’s favor and gain God’s approval for Him even to look to you and really mean the free gospel also for you? The Christian religion, the only true religion, is a religion of grace, free grace, from beginning to end, and it is the only religion that is such. To become saved, come just as you are, to Jesus and He will save you in spite of so much, and everything indeed, not right with you. God saves sinners, the ungodly, the sinful, the miserable, the wretched, the corrupt and unholy, and even those who are not rightly repentant before Him! Just come to Him and He will make the crooked straight. Christ Jesus saves sinful, miserable, hopeless sinners, so why wouldn’t that include you? Come to Him, all you that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest; apply to Him with your sins and sinfulness, and see if He can’t give you a new heart and wash you clean. There is power in Jesus’ blood to save the most defiled and chief of sinners. Today is the day of salvation. Come to Jesus for His mercy and grace to save also a sinner like you, and I promise you in His Name, you will not be put to shame. But if you wait till you are more fit to come, you will continue frustrated and without hope.

Christian obedience to God’s law is so wonderful for it is willing obedience and thankful obedience, and it is also trusting obedience. That is, the call to Christian obedience to all God’s law is something the Lord doesn’t leave us to in our own strength, but He pledges to give us all we need to live in true and growing obedience to His law and to all His Word, and we are wholly to trust in Him. The life of sanctification flows out of the cross of Christ too, and is not something we must do and need to do on our own. How beautifully this also comes out in our Bible passage in John 14. In verse 15 we hear Jesus’ words to His disciples, *“If ye love Me, keep My commandments”* and Jesus comes back to that theme in verse 21 and following. And what is in between the verses 15 and 21? In those verses we hear Jesus telling of His promise of the Holy Spirit as “another Comforter” and constant divine companion and helper. In verse 19 as well, Jesus says, *“Because I live, ye shall live also”* telling that as resurrected Saviour, Jesus will ever abide with His people and supply them by His Word and Spirit in all their needs for body and soul, yes, especially also in living in Christian obedience to all God’s Word and will.