

## Summary

- a) This session is the fifth of ten sessions that looks at a vital principle that fosters Spirit-led living.
- b) The fifth principle that we will examine is this: Living by the Spirit begins when living for God ends.
- c) This session looks at the necessity of obedience in the abiding life, the difference between living under the law and living under grace, and Paul's struggle with his flesh after he was saved.

## Obeying Jesus' Commandments

- a) "If you keep My commandments," Jesus told His disciples, "You will abide in My love" (John 15:10).
- b) Notice Jesus' conditional language. *If you obey, then you will abide.*
- c) The abiding life hinges on obedience to Jesus' commandments.
- d) What, exactly, are Jesus' commandments? His commandments are scattered throughout the gospels, the epistles, and the book of Revelation. These include the requirements He spoke directly, recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Revelation. And the requirements He spoke indirectly, by the Spirit through His apostles.
- e) This means Jesus' commandments are all the requirements contained in the New Testament.
- f) These commandments include:
  - Stipulations to love God as our first love and to love one another as God has loved us;
  - God's moral requirements for living in the new covenant;
  - The mission He expects us to fulfill;
  - The works He calls us to do;
  - Who He expects us to be;
  - Exhortations to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

## God's Commandments Under Grace

- a) The requirements for living a godly life in the new covenant are not more lenient than those in the old covenant.
- b) Sometimes, I hear or read of Christians rejoicing that they have been liberated from rigid requirements and a demanding lifestyle.
- c) I, too, rejoice that I am not under the law but not because the new covenant is less rigid and demanding.
- d) On the contrary, when I study the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount, I don't find God's expectations to be lower. I find the exact opposite to be true. God's lofty standards and precise requirements are far more exacting under grace.
- e) For example, under the law, God expected you to be good and do good. Under grace, God expects you to be conformed into the image and likeness of Christ (see Rom. 8:29).
- f) Under the law, you were guilty of murder if you took a physical life. Under grace, you are guilty of murder if you harbor bitterness, anger, or hate toward another (see Matt. 5:21-22).

- g) Under the law, you were guilty of adultery if you if you had sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse. Under grace, you are guilty of adultery if you look at a woman with lust in your heart (see Matt. 5:27-28).
- h) Under the law, you had to actually commit the act while under grace you merely have to want to commit the act.

## Living Under Grace

- a) Living under grace does not mean you are free to disobey God’s commandments, lower His righteous standards, water down the truth, or make the moral law’s “demands less demanding and . . . permissions more permissive.”<sup>1</sup>
- b) Nor does it mean you are exempt from a lifestyle devoted to prayer, the Word, giving, missions, and obedience.
- c) What it does mean, however, is you can’t become holy by striving in your flesh to obey God’s external commandments. Only Christ, who kept the moral law perfectly while on earth, is the One who can keep the moral law perfectly within you as you continually yield to His Spirit (see Rom. 8:4).
- d) The law is primarily concerned with behavior modification, external compliance, and bodily restraint.
- e) Grace, on the other hand, is primarily concerned about the transformation of the heart and subsequent obedience from the heart in motive, thought, and deed.
- f) The main difference, therefore, is grace gives you a new righteous status, a new righteous spirit, a new heart, the indwelling Spirit, and access to God’s empowering grace, making obedience possible not optional.
- g) This is why I rejoice that I am not under the law but under grace (see Rom. 6:14).

## The Law Contrasted with Grace

- a) In the old covenant, notice how the law placed all the burden upon God’s people to keep His righteous ordinances:
  - “You shall have no other gods before Me;
  - “You shall not make for yourself an idol; . . .
  - “You shall not worship them or serve them; . . .
  - “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; . . .
  - “You shall not murder.
  - “You shall not commit adultery.
  - “You shall not steal.
  - “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
  - “You shall not covet” (Exo. 20:3-17, emphasis mine).
- b) Under the law, all the responsibility for obedience was placed upon God’s people, summarized by the emphatic command you shall not.
- c) Contrast this with the new covenant under grace. We see through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel God said:

- “I will put My law within them;”
  - “I will write it” on their heart;
  - “I will be their God;”
  - “I will sprinkle clean water on you;”
  - “I will cleanse you from all your filthiness;”
  - “I will give you a new heart;”
  - “I will . . . put a new spirit within you;”
  - “I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh;”
  - “[I will] give you a heart of flesh;”
  - “I will put My Spirit within you;”
  - “[I will] cause you to walk in My statutes” (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:25-27, emphasis mine).
- d) In these four verses, the Lord vowed to do eleven things for us and in us before giving us the requirement to “be careful to observe [His] ordinances” (Ezek. 36:27).
- e) This illustrates the clear transition from living under the law to living under grace. God’s demands upon us, summarized by you shall not, become what He does for us and in us, summarized by I will.

## Grace Versus the Law

- a) Under grace, the Lord took on the responsibility to do a work for you and in you so you could keep the demands He makes on you.
- b) Under the law, the focus was completely on you—your performance, your obedience, your works.
- c) Under grace, the focus has completely shifted to Christ, who finished the work for you and is now finishing the work in you as He lives His life through you.
- d) The law demanded a people devoid of a godly nature should, ought to, and must behave a certain way.
- e) Grace, on the other hand, shifts the external obligation to obey God from an unrighteous nature to an internal desire to obey God from a new righteous nature.
- f) In the new covenant, you get a new want to in your spirit, which eventually works its way outward into your heart, soul, and body.
- g) One main difference, therefore, between living under the law and living under grace is how you obey (see Rom. 6:14-15).
- Will you try to obey Jesus’ commandments by living for God?
  - Or will you obey His commandments by living from God?
- h) That is the million-dollar question. And it brings me to the fifth law of the Spirit-led life. Living by the Spirit begins when living for God ends.

- i) If you think about it, obeying Jesus' stringent commandments is impossible. He is the only one who can do it. And unless He lives in you and through—unless you live from His indwelling life—you will never be able to obey all He expects and requires. This is why living from God is essential.

## Romans 7:7-13 and 7:14-25

- a) Let me pause for a second and explain how I view Romans 7:7-13 and Romans 7:14-25.
- b) There's a big debate among scholars whether these two passages are Paul's personal testimony or if he is impersonating someone's pre-conversion state. I won't take the time to debate the different views. But here's what I believe:
- Romans 7:7-13, spoken in the past tense, is Paul's personal testimony before he was saved. This passage describes how the law's commandments brought death to him because the Spirit of Christ did not dwell within him. Since he had no power within himself to obey God's commandments, the law's ordinances brought death to him.
  - Romans 7:14-25, spoken in the present tense, is Paul's personal testimony of how he was delivered from his battle with the flesh after he was saved. Once he began to rely on the indwelling Spirit to obey God's commandments, he experienced victory over his flesh.

## Paul Delivered from Living for God

- a) Paul said, "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7:14-15).
- b) There is nothing wrong with the law, for it is spiritual, holy, righteous, and good. But there was something gravely wrong with Paul. He was, like us, a sinner by nature. His flesh—his unregenerate body and unrenewed soul—was incapable of obeying God's holy and righteous commandments.
- c) Paul's flesh seemed fairly good and righteous when God's exacting requirements were not examining him. But the moment the law demanded his behavior conform exactly to God's holy ordinances, his true sinful nature was revealed.
- d) Paul wanted to keep God's commandments, but because he was "of flesh, sold into bondage to sin," he had no hope apart from the power of the indwelling Spirit.
- e) Paul continued, "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not" (Rom. 7:17-18).
- f) God's commandments exposed Paul's sin nature—the unregenerate part of him. Namely, his sin-tainted body and self-centered soul, where "sin . . . dwells" and "nothing good dwells." Paul referred to this evil, sinful part of him as the flesh.

## Paul's Struggle with Coveting After Conversion

- a) After Paul's conversion, he still struggled with the law's commandments. In Romans 7:14-25, Paul didn't say explicitly what commandment he struggled to obey. Perhaps he still struggled with coveting.
- b) For the sake of this example, I am just going to assume that coveting was one of Paul's main struggles both before and after conversion. After the Spirit came to dwell within Paul, the conviction he experienced was much deeper than before he was saved.

- c) As I walk through Paul's struggle with coveting, what is your struggle? Lust, anger, pride, jealousy, coveting, or fear? Think of your own struggle with a particular sin so you can personalize Paul's struggle and gain victory like he did.
- d) As the Spirit and the Word brought conviction to Paul, he may have seen just how penetrating this commandment not to covet was. Maybe Paul realized how much he desired others' possessions—that his life revolved around coveting, and no matter how hard he tried, Paul couldn't turn this off in his own power and strength.
- e) What was going on within Paul? The indwelling Spirit used the external commandment to expose his flesh. God's commandment revealed the ugly reality lurking within him—the inherent propensity to sin imbedded in his unredeemed body and unrenewed soul.
- f) The Lord's exacting requirements revealed the utter depravity of Paul's sin nature—the old self Paul mentioned in his epistles (see Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9).
- g) After this showdown with the commandment, and Paul's inherent problem with coveting was unmasked, Paul tried to keep God's commandment by self-effort and self-determination. As you read what Paul said, notice how many times Paul used the word *I*, *me*, or *my*:

For what *I* am doing, *I* do not understand; for *I* am not practicing what *I* would like to do, but *I* am doing the very thing *I* hate. But if *I* do the very thing *I* do not want to do, *I* agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am *I* the one doing it, but sin which dwells in *me*. For *I* know that nothing good dwells in *me*, that is, in *my* flesh; for the willing is present in *me*, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that *I* want, *I* do not do, but *I* practice the very evil that *I* do not want. But if *I* am doing the very thing *I* do not want, *I* am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in *me*. (Rom. 7:15-20, emphasis mine)

- h) In these six verses, Paul used the word *I* eighteen times, *me* four times, and *my* once, totaling twenty-three instances where Paul focused upon himself. What happened? The commandment caused Paul to focus upon himself rather than Jesus.
- i) After Paul was born again, he initially thought God required him to keep the commandments in his own strength and power. So, Paul tried to keep God's requirements himself and this was a major problem.
- j) Far from doing what pleased God, Paul realized he had a serious problem with coveting. And no matter how hard he tried, no amount of self-effort or self-determination could turn it off.
- k) Though Paul desperately wanted to obey God's commandments fully, he was doing the exact opposite.

## Desperation Leads to Life

- a) Before a lifeguard attempts to rescue one who is drowning, they will wait for the person to give up every effort to save themselves. Otherwise, the lifeguard could be pulled under and perhaps drown as well. But after the drowning person has no more strength to save themselves, the lifeguard comes to the rescue, grabs hold of them, and brings them to safety.
- b) In the same way, God's commandments drove Paul to the place of utter desperation, and like a lifeguard, the Lord waited until Paul had exhausted all his strength and power trying to obey before coming to the rescue.
- c) When Paul reached the end of himself, he cried out in dire helplessness, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).
- d) If Paul was anything like us, before he reached this point of desperation, he likely made new resolutions and redoubled his willpower, vowing to obey God at all costs. Yet time after time, Paul failed. He simply could not obey God's requirements perfectly by self-effort and self-determination.

- e) Finally, Paul realized Jesus not only saved him from sins, but He could also save him from the source of sins—living by self-life in the soul. When this light of revelation shined into Paul’s heart, he rejoiced and said, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25).
- f) The Lord’s commandments not only revealed Paul’s sin nature—his old self—but it also drove him to live from his spirit by the power of the indwelling Spirit.
- g) Paul then said, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2).

## God Patiently Waits Until We Surrender

- a) Paul discovered the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus after God’s commandment revealed the utter depravity of his flesh. This caused Paul to see his desperate need to live moment by moment by the power of the indwelling Spirit, so he could fully obey God.
- b) Until you realize obeying God’s commandments from the heart in motive, thought, and deed—whether in the moral law, the gospels, the epistles, or in the book of Revelation—is impossible in your own strength, God’s grace cannot flow into your life.
- c) The law of the Spirit operates after the external commandments reveal the utter depravity of your flesh.
- d) The Holy Spirit, like the wise lifeguard, waits to rescue you until you have exhausted all your effort and energy trying to obey God’s lofty requirements.
- e) God knows who we are—that in our flesh dwells no good thing and we are powerless to obey His commandments. The problem is we don’t know who we are until the commandment comes and highlights the utter depravity of our flesh.
- f) Since we are proud and stubborn, like the four-year-old child who always says, “I can do it,” God allows us to exhaust all our strength and effort trying to obey His external commandments.
- g) He waits until we realize our flesh is wretched and only the indwelling Spirit can empower us to obey His requirements.
- h) Once Paul realized he could not live for God in his own strength and power, he shifted to living from God, relying on the indwelling Spirit for strength and power to overcome his flesh and obey God fully every moment of the day.
- i) Paul learned the hard way that living by the Spirit begins when living for God ends.
- j) This discovery likely led Paul to pen Romans 7:4: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”
- k) Speaking from firsthand experience, Paul wanted us to know that we died to the law when we died with Christ.
- l) Or stated slightly different, we died to living for God. Paul also wanted us to know that our spirits were resurrected and joined to Christ, so we could live from God and bear fruit for Him.

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<sup>1</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, USA, 1978), p. 79.