

# Theological Equipping Class

## Obedience

February 1, 2026

How would you answer these?

- Can we as Christians anger or displease God?
- Do we have the power to obey God?
- Are our works filthy rags?
- Does God see sin in believers or does He only see Jesus?
- Are good works necessary for believers?
- Should we ever look at our own lives for assurance of salvation?

The Necessity of Distinction

- “It is the first rule of intelligent discussion that one should understand what one is arguing about.” (G.K. Chesterton)
- The danger of category mistakes
  - What color is the number 3?
  - Where is God located? Where is heaven located? Where is the soul located?
  - Nature vs. person
    - Trinity: 3 persons in 1 nature
    - Christology: 2 natures in 1 person
- Obedience distinctions:
  - Justification from sanctification
  - Positional from progressive sanctification
  - Law from gospel

## Positional and Progressive Sanctification

- Positional sanctification: we are (already) sanctified
  - *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours... (1 Corinthians 1:2)*
  - *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)*
  - *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10)*

- The pursuit of holiness: the already, but not yet
  - *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)*
  - *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)*
  - *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor... (1 Thessalonians 4:3–4)*
  - *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)*
- There is a categorical distinction between positional and progressive sanctification.
- Luther: passive and active sanctification.
  - Active is “the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence.” (Luther)
  - “I am saying this in order that no one may suppose that we reject or prohibit good works, as the papists falsely accuse us because they understand neither what they themselves are saying nor what we are teaching.” (Luther)

## The Danger of Antinomianism

- What is antinomianism?
  - Coined by Luther (“Against the Antinomians”)
  - Anti (against) and nomos (law)
- Kinds of antinomianism.
  - Christ broke the law for love
  - Because they are under grace, it doesn’t matter if they sin.
  - Because God only sees Christ in us, its never possible for Christians to displease God.
  - Free grace theology that divides the call to believe from the call to repent.
  - “Don’t worry about it,” when it comes to sin.

## Three Uses of the Law

- First use: “show God’s righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness” (Calvin)
  - “dismissing the stupid opinion of their own strength, they come to realize that they stand and are upheld by God’s hand alone; that, naked and empty-handed, they flee to his mercy, repose entirely in it, hide deep within it, and seize upon it alone for righteousness and merit” (Calvin)
  - “the law bids us, as we try to fulfil its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace” (Augustine)
  - “God commands what we cannot do that we may know what we ought to seek from him.” (Augustine)
  - “If the Spirit of grace is absent, the law is present only to accuse and kill us.” (Augustine)
  - “The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace.” (Augustine)
  - Where do we see this use in Scripture?
  - *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”* (Galatians 3:10)
  - *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* (James 2:10)
  - *So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.* (Galatians 3:24)
  - *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* (Romans 3:20)
- Second use: “the second function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law” (Calvin)
  - “by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice” (Calvin)
  - God has given us the law to curb the effect of sin.

- Third use: “the third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.” (Calvin)
  - “among sinners can engender nothing but death, ought among the saints to have a better and more excellent use” (Calvin)

### The Gospel Empowers Obedience

- As Augustine writes:
  - “The law commands, grace supplies the strength to act.” (Augustine)
  - “Give what you command and command what you will.” (Augustine)
- Two dangers to avoid.
  - We can act without grace (Pelagianism).
  - Grace is impotent, grace doesn’t empower, grace doesn’t transform us. (Antinomianism)
- God teaches his people how to obey.
  - “here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord’s will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it” (Calvin)
  - “the servant of God will also avail himself of this benefit of the law: by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression.” (Calvin)
  - “He lays hold not only of the precepts, but the accompanying promise of grace, which alone sweetens what is bitter.” (Calvin)
- “We ought not to be frightened away from the law or to shun its instruction merely because it requires a much stricter moral purity than we shall reach while we bear about us the prison house of the body.” (Calvin)
- “We need the Decalogue [10 Commandments] not only to apprise us of our lawful obligations, but we also need it to discern how far the Holy Spirit has advanced us in his work of sanctification and by how much we still fall short of the goal, lest we become secure and imagine that we have now done all that is required. Thus we must constantly grow in sanctification and always become new creatures in Christ.” (Luther)

## The New Covenant

- *Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31–34)*
- *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25–27)*
- *But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. (Deuteronomy 29:4)*
- Newness of the New
- *And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:3)*
- *But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7:6)*
- *To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. (1 Corinthians 9:21)*
- run John run, the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands, far better news the gospels brings, it bids me fly and gives me wings.
- *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)*
- Tullian Tchividjian: You Can't Teach a Frog to Fly so Stop Trying.
- *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age... (Titus 2:11-12)*

- *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* (2 Corinthians 7:1)
- “There is grace administered by the promises of the gospel, enabling us to perform the obedience of it in that way and manner which God will accept.” (John Owen)
- “What else has the Holy Ghost wrought in you by the Gospel? The Holy Ghost has sanctified me in the true faith, so that I can now overcome sin and do good works.” (Luther, Small Catechism Q169)
- *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* (Romans 6:1)
- *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* (Romans 6:2)
- “Those who are born of God increasingly become the children of God and bear his image and likeness, because in principle they already are his children.” (Herman Bavinck)
  - *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* (Romans 6:11)
  - *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* (Romans 6:12–13)
  - *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.* (Romans 6:19)
- “The New Testament calls upon us to take action; it does not tell us that the work of sanctification is going to be done for us...We are in the ‘good fight of faith’, and we have to do the fighting. But, thank God, we are enabled to do it; for the moment we believe, and are justified by faith, and are born again of the Spirit of God, we have the ability. So the New Testament method of sanctification is to remind us of that; and having reminded us of it, it says, ‘Now then, go and do it.’ (Martin Lloyd-Jones)
- And how does the book of Romans end? With a list of exhortations and commands.
- Indicative -> Imperative
- Christ died to save you not only from the penalty of sin, but the power and presence of sin. To some degree, you could say that the penalty was dealt with in justification, the power in sanctification, and the presence in glorification.
- Saved not *by*, but *for* works.

## What is legalism?

- Multiple types of legalism.
  - separate the external law from the internal purpose
  - when you attempt to obey out of your own strength apart from grace
  - when we add to God's law
  - when you selectively pick and choose which laws to obey
- Nowhere in Scripture is it suggested that its legalistic to tell people to do what God says.
- legalists don't actually love God's law
- *Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.* (Psalm 119:97)
- "Antinomianism and legalism are not so much antithetical to each other as they are both antithetical to grace. This is why Scripture never prescribes one as the antidote for the other. Rather grace, God's grace in Christ in our union with Christ, is the antidote to both." (Ferguson)
- "legalism and antinomianism are, in fact, nonidentical twins that emerge from the same womb. Eve's rejection of God's law (antinomianism) was in fact the fruit of her distorted view of God (legalism)." (Sinclair Ferguson)
- "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. (Matthew 23:23)
- Christ is the cure to legalism and antinomianism.
- "We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is "of him." If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth he was made like us in all respects that he might learn to feel our pain. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other." (Calvin, *Inst.*, II.xvi.19)

## Maintain the mystery

- "Our theological grammar functions in part to preserve the integrity of the revealed mystery of God at precisely those points where human reason may be tempted to diminish it in an effort to render God more easily understood by the human intellect." (James Dolezal)

- *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12–13)*

1. Get serious.

- “People do not drift toward Holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.” (D.A. Carson)

2. Avail yourself of all possible Biblical motivations.

- We obey BECAUSE: Duty, Delight, God’s omniscience, It’s the right thing to do, Its for our good, God’s example, Christ’s example, Assurance, Evangelism, The return of Christ, The futility and folly of sin, The promise of future grace, The promise of future judgment, The surety of our inheritance, The communion of the saints, The good examples of others, The bad examples of others, the fear of the Lord, the love of the Lord, the glory of God

3. Do the right action even if you don't feel like it.

- half-hearted obedience is better than disobedience | don't compound one sin with another.

4. Practice spiritual disciplines.

- Pursue the means of grace (see last month’s TEC)

5. Don't freak out if you get off track a bit. The goal is faithfulness.

- What’s the difference between condemnation and conviction?
- *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)*
- “for every one look at yourself, take 10 looks at Christ.” (Robert Murray Mc’Cheyne)

Recommended Works on Sanctification and How that Relates to Obedience

- The Hole in our Holiness (Kevin DeYoung)
- The Whole Christ (Sinclair Ferguson)
- Already Sanctified (Don Payne)
- Antinomianism (Mark Jones)
- The Gospel According to Jesus (John MacArthur)