

## 8 The Whole Purpose of Law

<sup>13</sup>“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Go and say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “Will you not receive instruction by listening to My words?” declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup>“The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are observed. So they do not drink wine to this day, for they have obeyed their father’s command. But I have spoken to you again and again; yet you have not listened to Me. (Jeremiah 35:13-14 NASB95)

The descendants of Rechab spoken of in Jeremiah followed the commands of their father Jonadab. They were not to drink wine, and they were supposed to live in tents and take care of livestock. These things they did faithfully. God used them as a good example of obedience, and blessed them for it. However, Israel did not compare favorably. The Rechabites did as their father said, but Israel wouldn’t obey *their* Father. God asks His people for simple obedience, and blesses us when we honor Him. Just as the Rechabites honored their father.

God’s gracious Law is a perfect gift with a number of benefits attached that we also call blessings. There are 24 listed here. They are not the only blessings, but they are a good cross-section. We get benefits when we get the Law. God’s purpose is to bless, and His Law has tremendous blessings. Some only get a few benefits because they only accept a little of what God has to offer. But if we plunge in with whole hearts, we will gain the approval of our Father and we reap a full harvest of blessings, pressed down and overflowing. Just like the Rechabites.

*Connects Spirit and physical.* ‘Behaviorism’ is a term that describes the process of modifying thinking or feeling by consistent action. Studies have proven that smiling, for instance, when we do not feel like smiling, will improve the way we feel and even bring about a smiling attitude. We salivate as mom is cooking dinner, especially our favorite dinner. Fourth of July celebrations make children into Republicans.<sup>1</sup> We modify our insides with outside actions all the time without even planning it.

Some in the church are afraid of the Law because they think it is behaviorism, and this is somehow bad. It is too ‘material.’ They’ve bought into the false idea that doing something without feeling like it is hypocrisy. Western Christians get the ‘physical is bad’ thinking from our Greek heritage. Among other things, Greek thinking is very linear and assumes that material and spiritual things are separate, and only spiritual things are good.

Mixed in with the Greek thinking people are the hippies who entered the church in the ‘60’s from the ‘Jesus people’ movement. But the Jesus they followed was the false Christ of ‘Godspell’ and ‘Jesus Christ Superstar.’ And they didn’t leave their eastern, sentimental, sort-of-spiritualism at the door. They simply ‘Christianized’ some of their practices such as transcendental meditation.<sup>2</sup> Instead of changing to God’s standard, they remade Jesus in their

<sup>1</sup> Study by Harvard University cited in US News & World Report, Paul Bedard, June 30, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> TM, or transcendental meditation, was really big in the ‘60’s. You may remember the chant of “ohm, ohm” or “oh-ma-na-pahd-me-ohm.” The chant is supposed to focus attention outside of the physical world on the so-called

own image. Now they just sing songs over and over (and over and over) instead of chanting ‘ohm.’ The hippies went establishment, and they changed their outside somewhat. Inside, however, they were, and are, still the same.

One of the first blessings believers get when we embrace the whole of God’s Word is it helps connect the spiritual and the physical worlds. The inside and the outside. God’s Word is not spiritual or physical. It is spiritual *and* physical. His intentions are for the Spirit and the Word to work as one on both the material and immaterial parts of believers.

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB95)

We have to pursue changes with a whole effort. Inside (the heart) and out. If we love God and want to do His will, then His Laws will help us change and grow. As we move forward in obedience, we continue to remove bad practices from our lives and replace them with good ones. Paul tells us in the verses above to present our bodies a living sacrifice, and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We train our bodies with God’s action regimen (the physical part of the Word). We transform our minds by rightly dividing the Word to help our practice. Both are critical ingredients of working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

We do not have to wait for our minds to renew first and then do what God says. Nor do we have to disconnect our actions from our minds. We present our bodies (the outside) as a sacrifice by doing what God commands. We transform our mind (the inside) by continued reading. Then the Word and the Spirit train us in righteousness and blessings flow freely. In the following verses, see how the fruit of the Spirit is connected with things like fruitful fields, justice, and righteousness, which in turn leads to peace, quietness and trust forever.

<sup>14</sup>For the palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks; <sup>15</sup>until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. <sup>16</sup>Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. <sup>17</sup>And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. (Isaiah 32:14-17 ESV)

*Justice.* Another blessing from the Law that could use a whole book is justice. Everything God gives us is connected together and balanced, and justice is right there in the mix, with love and mercy. Micah tells us this in a summary of the Law, which is similar to the ‘two commands’ and many other summaries.

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‘god-mind,’ and is an attempt to connect with it. It is from eastern mysticism and thoroughly pagan, but has found its way into the church in the form of endless song and prayer repetitions. Matthew 6:7.

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8 ESV)

His Law teaches us real justice, which is mixed with mercy, love and humility. Everyone has some sense of justice. Anyone who has raised children, or been a child, knows the laser-like focus on justice a child has when mom is handing out deserts and a sibling has a larger slice. Generally, though, our innate sense of justice is very self-centered and lopsided. God's justice, outlined in the Law, is much more balanced, holy, loving and merciful.

Many, many blessings flow from learning and applying His brand of justice in the Law. Sadly, in modern culture, justice is falling by the wayside. Lawyers tell me that juries convict on feelings rather than testimony and facts. Jail has replaced paying restitution. The death penalty is taking a holiday, but the blood of innocents aborted cries out for justice, and surely deafens heavenly watchers. Murderers, kidnappers and rapists go free, but parking violators stay.

The church is right in there with modern culture in what it approves.<sup>3</sup> We do not make thorough investigations (Deuteronomy 13:14, 17:14, and 19:18). We judge by appearances (John 7:24). More weight is given to a wealthy person's opinions over a poor person's (Exodus 23:6). In general we do not speak out against abortion, homosexuality, adultery, witchcraft, drugs, and other behavior as we should. Nor do we restrict it in our assemblies. Matthew 18 is never applied correctly to my knowledge. Well, maybe to thin out the disagreeable. To make us feel better we throw a coat of 'social justice' over the gaping mud holes made by ignoring His real justice, and call it good. At least until we step in the hole and find ourselves up to our armpits in alligators.

Remember, blessing is the presence of God. A curse, at its root, is the absence of God. Creation is under a curse, meaning that God has withdrawn to some extent. That's why we have thorns and poisonous critters to fight all the time. If we reject the Law, we compound the curse with a lack of justice, and God will not allow injustice to continue forever.

*Protection.* Believers need protection from the opinions of men, and God's Law provides it. He protects us by not having to jump through the hoops formed by extreme feelings or tradition. There are approved actions, and actions that are not. If we are doing His approved actions we don't have to worry about the opinions of men. For instance, if I don't want to eat ham and someone doesn't like my choice, I am still at peace because I am abiding in His Word. When I rest on Sabbath, my love for God and His Word protects me from the judgment of others who don't want to rest. I have confidence in His Law, and as I seek His approval I do not have to worry about the approval of men (Colossians 2:16-23).

*Gets us moving.* Yes, our reliance on Jesus' sacrifice is the one and only action needed to gain right standing with God. But instead of just standing there, God requires that the life be changed to match up with His Word ("put on the new man" Ephesians 4:20-24, "be filled with the Spirit" Ephesians 5:18-21, etc.). The message of the Law is, don't just stand there, do something! We are supposed to keep moving toward the Christ and His example.

<sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.  
(Romans 10:4 NASB95)

Jesus is the 'end' (it means 'goal') of the Law, so doing the Law takes us to Jesus. It's

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<sup>3</sup> Remember we're talking about the whole of the Book, not just lip-service to some alleged 'moral' laws.

like taking a train (the ‘gospel train?’ the ‘peace train?’). It takes us where we want to go. Other people can take the same train and end up at the same goal. But your goal has to be Jesus; because that is the only place the Law train goes. If you want to go someplace besides the Jesus stop, you’ll either ride in circles or have to take a different train.

Frequently someone who is newly ‘saved’ will ask, “What do I do now?” The standard answer is, “Nothing. Jesus did it all.” We are so thoroughly conditioned against ‘works,’ we take great pains to educate the newbies away from ‘doing.’ This ‘do nothing’ attitude discourages maturity. The new believer is robbed of independence (from groups) and goals, not to mention abundant life blessings. He or she is not taught to rely on the Word as a guide for righteousness.

Eating and drinking His body and blood fosters dependence on God instead of a pastor or church. The new believer is encouraged to develop his or her own relationship directly with the Father through the Son (by His Word). His goals are given to Him by God. He’s got the guidebook right there in front of him, an objective standard needing no improvement.

The Law has been routinely and falsely portrayed as impossible to follow. But it is much easier to implement a few simple written rules than it is to do some of the other things He asks us to do. Sometimes we are tasked with things that are really difficult, such as dying for our faith or having to flee a home or country because of persecution.

*Straightens perversity.* One of the reasons Law was given is because man is perverse. This is defined as doing differently than God has directed.<sup>4</sup> I do a lot of woodworking, and I use an ‘L’ shaped piece of metal called a carpenter’s square to check if the wood is square or straight. God’s Law is like a carpenter’s square. It is a straight path for our feet and a light to our way. We compare our will and actions with it, and we find out if we are straight and square. When we aren’t, He makes adjustments to bring us in line. Sometimes with sandpaper. Ouch.

Perversion is as obvious as homosexuality or as simple as ignoring His holidays. Or even eating fruit from the wrong tree. Humans in general are quite creative when it comes to acting perverse. We seem to take delight in exploring just how many ways we can pervert anything God says (Deuteronomy 32:5, 20; Acts 2:40, 20:29-30). We’ll even go so far as to take the carpenter’s square of His Word and tweak it so it fits us, instead of using it to keep us straight.

No matter what God says to do, in our perversity we’ve gotta do it at least slightly different. If He says stay away from the tree of knowledge, we make it into a buffet, complete with fancy lighting and a sneeze shield. He created man and woman to be together in marriage; we come up with sterile and destructive “alternate lifestyles.” He says don’t eat certain things; we go out of our way to farm and mass market pork and shellfish.

The church would like to think that somehow, we are different, and more apt to follow what God says. But we have the same tendency toward perversity as the non-churched. We’re just a little more creative in how we go about it. We come up with all kinds of nifty theories to help give ourselves permission to sin.

We’ve got ‘different ages’ that separate commands for ‘other people.’ There are spiritualized covenants that distance us from actual doing. There’s the ‘anti-theology’ crowd and the touchy-feely ‘social justice’ crowd. It seems there’s no end to our dodging. But no matter how artfully we decorate the fig leaves, or how well we hide in the bushes (Genesis 3:7-8), no matter how we tweak the carpenter’s square, the Word is always there to straighten out our lack of obedience. Or measure us for judgment.

*Perfect practice.* Another purpose of the Law is practice. My high school band teacher was the first one to tell me that “perfect practice makes perfect.” Practice alone doesn’t make

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<sup>4</sup> Some dictionaries say “willfully determined, or disposed, to go counter to what is right, good or proper.”

perfect. If you practice sloppy, you will play sloppy. We had to practice perfection, because in performances you will play as you practiced. It's true, too. If I didn't get it right in practice, I would blow it in the performance. I would play just like I practiced. God wants us to practice each part of Torah (the Law) to perfection, so we will act the same no matter who is watching.

When we start to learn almost any skill or task, we get simple things first. More complicated things are added as we get familiar with the basics. God's law functions this way for the believer too. We can start with simple things like diet changes and a day of rest. Then we progress to more complicated principles such as patience and self-control. We work back and forth between easy and hard stuff, like a kid learning to play a musical instrument. We learn notes and simple songs first. Later we get a symphony solo.

Learning the simple, concrete things helps to pave the way for learning the more difficult actions. We find out that God is concerned about every area of His children's life, from what we eat and wear to the fruit of the Spirit. The more we practice right things the more sanctified (set apart) we become.

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.  
(Galatians 5:22-23 ESV)

Of course there's no law against such things as patience, kindness and self-control. That's because if we have those things we have the Law. All those things are what God wants for us in the first place, and why He gives His living oracles to us.

*It's universal.* God's law or Word applies to everyone, not just to believers. There are a number of places in Scripture, for instance, that speak of God's judgment on nations other than Israel. God has the right to judge them. And what does He judge them by?

<sup>5</sup>The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. <sup>6</sup>Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left. (Isaiah 24:5-6 NASB95)

<sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord GOD, 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her. <sup>6</sup>'But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statutes more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statutes.' (Ezekiel 5:5-6 NASB95)

That's right; God judges by the Law (also called the "everlasting covenant"). How can God judge people who aren't part of the covenant? Because everyone knows what is right and wrong, even if they don't have the Bible.

<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup>because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal

power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:18-21 NASB95)

It's not that people don't know what God wants. Verse 19 says "*that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them.*" They know what God requires, they just don't want to give it (verse 21). We all have sinned, whether we possess the written commands or not. God's Law is an opportunity to understand what God requires and adjust ourselves to it. Ignorance is not bliss. Everyone will have to answer for their actions.

*It stabilizes.* The Law is life and health to our being, because it's a part of the whole Word of God. It is the Bread of Life, blessing and vitality for the soul. It is the difference between merely existing and really living. A fly exists but spends its life in filth. A mouse lives but is constantly fearful.

A malnourished child lives, yes, but just barely. Every day is a struggle to find enough food to make it through the next day. He or she is weak, listless, and incapable of much more than trying to find more food. The well-nourished child on the other hand is healthy, happy, and well able to pursue any activity. God's complete Word is the nutrition His children need to be healthy, content, mature, and have life abundantly.

There are two attitudes we are talking about here. The first attitude says that the Law has been nullified by some 'new thing' that Jesus did. The second attitude sees the Word as eternally existing and unchangeable, the Law as part of God's gracious promise, and God as The Rock.

The first attitude leads to viewing God as capricious and constantly shifting the relationships between Himself and others. He plays games like giving Israel a covenant they supposedly couldn't follow. The second attitude sees God as always loving, always merciful and ever constant (Exodus 34:5-7). He uses a progressive revelation that builds on previous revelations to unfold His promise without fail.

The first attitude causes anxiety because one never knows what the capricious God will do next. The second produces the fruit of the Spirit, because God can be counted on always to do what He says He will do. The first rips away the anchor of God's Word because the plain meaning is destroyed. The second attitude generates confidence because the Word is understandable as it is read by the average person.

*It marks His children.* The Law (God's Word) is a 'sign' or 'mark' of those who follow God. It is not necessarily a physical mark such as a stamp on the hand, although there are some physical marks too such as circumcision.

"And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. (Genesis 17:11 NASB95)

A physical mark can accompany those who are unhappy with the ways of the world and long for a society that follows His ways.

<sup>4</sup> The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." (Ezekiel 9:4 NASB95)

The Sabbath is a sign of those who know that He is the Lord our God. All who ‘sanctify’ it or set it apart like it’s supposed to be are God’s. Sanctifying Sabbaths is the same as walking in His statutes and keeping (observing) His ordinances (Laws).

<sup>19</sup> ‘I am the LORD your God; walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and observe them. <sup>20</sup> ‘Sanctify My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.’ (Ezekiel 20:19-20 NASB95)

The ‘mark of the beast’ (Revelation 13:16-17) may be a physical mark, but the mark is just an outward sign of what the people have already chosen. They’ve already sold out to the beast and his image (Revelation 14:9, 11). People in the Bible are marked because of obedience. Observing God’s ordinances and statutes ‘marks’ us as belonging to God, just as worship of the beast ‘marks’ those who belong to the deceiver. External marks certify (or ‘signify’) like a nametag or a badge. But our behavior identifies us more surely than paint or ink to God. External marks are for those who can’t see as He does, such as angels and people.

*The best discipleship method ever.* The Law is not for salvation. It never has been.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it is a tried and true method to condition us and train us for righteousness. It is the best discipleship system ever devised. God’s Law, or Word, trains us to be like the Kingdom version of the Navy Seals. We handle any of life’s problems under any conditions and still reach the target. That target is Jesus, our hearts desire.<sup>6</sup>

There have been many attempts by man to develop discipleship or training systems, and some of them are even based on the Word. But they are not the Word, and therefore even the best of them are just not as effective as His. Even the methods of Bill Gothard and Ray Comfort, who are closer than many others, still do not reach the effectiveness of God’s whole Law.

The Spirit uses God’s Word to work on the flesh and transform the mind. That is exactly what it is designed to do by the Creator of our bodies and souls. It is an objective standard that takes the guesswork out of what is right behavior and what isn’t. It is backed by the authority of God. So if He says a practice will work a certain way, then if followed in faith (remember, ‘trusting obedience’) it will do exactly what He promises.

<sup>19</sup>I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. (Romans 6:19 NASB95)

Paul gives us another metaphor to help our understanding about training.

<sup>24</sup>Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. <sup>25</sup>Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup>Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; <sup>27</sup>but I discipline my body and make it my

<sup>5</sup> Although following God’s Word by repentance and obedience certainly gives life, and salvation *is* a command.

<sup>6</sup> That’s what Romans 10:4 really means – that Jesus is the goal of the Law. Jews, who had the Law, did not accept God’s righteousness (Jesus) but sought to establish their own. They did not follow the Law to its goal.

slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NASB95)

Paul says he disciplines his body, or trains, in such a way as to win the race. The Law, as part of the whole Word of God, helps us with this training. Salvation is not the only issue—there is also walking in a manner worthy of the God who calls us.

<sup>10</sup>You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; <sup>11</sup>just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, <sup>12</sup>so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 NASB95)

<sup>7</sup>But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; <sup>8</sup>for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (1 Timothy 4:7-8 NASB95)

The single biggest factor in our growth as believers is probably the switch from thinking of God's Word in negative terms to positive ones. Part of this depends on how we see God. If we see Him as a big, capricious meany thumping on people all the time, we think of His Laws as tools for mistreatment. But if we see Him as the source of good, then His Law is life for us.

*Teaches children.* I was talking to a guy from Voice of the Martyrs magazine at my church a few years ago. He was there with a speaker warning of the danger of Islam. I can't remember his name, but we got into a discussion because of the tassels on my pants (see chapter 10). He was familiar with some of the concepts in this book on the positive portrayal of the Law, and he made an interesting comment.

He said we (the church) are losing kids in the inner cities to Islam because of the attraction of discipline. Islam offers a discipleship method that is more structured than Christianity, and uses parts of God's Law. Many of our youth have become tired of floating in an endless sea of subjective sentiment. Our culture has cut itself loose from too many anchors.

Islam is attractive to the kids because it provides structure in an unstructured world. You might think this is merely anecdotal and not proof that something is wrong in the church. But it illustrates that youngsters are looking for more than watered-down Christianity is offering.

Following God's ways doesn't guarantee lack of problems, but it certainly works better than man-made rules or drifting aimlessly in a shifting sea of ever-changing feelings. In my opinion, God's instructions are way more effective than the ones we make up. God desires of us godly offspring, and the most effective way to raise them is to teach His Laws in word and deed.

<sup>15</sup>Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. (Malachi 2:15 ESV)

My children have been taught the Law and they are still following its precepts, and they tell me that the Word is much more meaningful to them than ever before. God's Word is

guaranteed to work because it is backed by His authority and power. We don't always cooperate, but the Word works. If we follow His directions, we will end up right where He wants us.

*Esteems God.* Our culture in the last few decades has placed a great emphasis on self-esteem. We think we need to work hard on building ourselves up and feeding our egos. The Bible, however, accurately informs us that we don't need more self-esteem. We already have an over-inflated sense of self-worth.

The problem is not what we think of ourselves, but how we treat God and others. We love ourselves just fine without having to bolster it or have it bolstered by others. "*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it*" (Ephesians 5:28-30). This is why verses like Leviticus 19:18 assume a love of self as a starting point for loving others. Notice too that "lovers of self" turns up in a very negative list in 2 Timothy.

<sup>1</sup>But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. <sup>2</sup>For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, <sup>4</sup>treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup>holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. (2 Timothy 3:1-5 NASB95)

In general, people want what God *has* but they do not want what God *is*. We want His power, His life, His blessings and all the other nice things that He has. But we do not want Him in charge of any of it. We love Psalm 23, but Psalm 119 doesn't exactly fan our flames.

Magic and other practices He prohibits are attempts to get what God has without God. Even medical science is mostly an attempt to eliminate the consequences of our behavior so we don't have to go to God for healing. Self-esteem doctrines tell us that what is important is what each person thinks or feels. They don't include what God thinks or feels. We want symptoms eliminated but we want to keep the disease.

<sup>9</sup>"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars." (2 Chronicles 16:9 NASB95)

We've got plenty of self-esteem coming out our ears already. What we really need is 'God esteem.' Obedience to the smallest instruction from God shows our esteem. When every jot and tittle of His Word, even the least command, is accepted and followed with love in the Spirit, we speak volumes about how we esteem our God. Self-esteem follows in its proper place.

*Touches God.* Every time we implement another instruction from our Father, it is as if we touch Him and He touches us. When we just trust Him and do what He says, like a little child, love flows between Him and us and other members of His Body. People long for a touch from God. They don't find it as often as they'd like because usually they want it on their own terms. Submitting to His Law allows more of His light inside. Obey commands and it is like we open windows one at a time in a dark, musty house.

The Jews refer to a command from God as a *mitzvah*, and liken each one to a thread between the believer and God. The more commands we do, the more threads are established and the more we are 'tied' to Him. The more threads we have the harder it is to wander away.

*Still a tutor.* The Law is called a 'tutor' by Paul. In his time, usually in Greek households,

a tutor would be sort of a guardian of a person's child. This was until the child reached the age when he or she could make their own decisions and be responsible for their own behavior. The tutor was responsible for teaching the child to function as an adult, and led them to maturity.

24Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:24-26 NASB95)

Once a person reaches maturity, it does not mean that all of the principles taught by the tutor disappear. Even if we are not 'under the law,' that doesn't mean we don't do it. 'Not under the Law' does not mean 'don't obey the Law.' It means that something else is 'over' us, which in this case is God's grace. We are under grace with the Law written on our heart.

If Paul had meant for us to avoid obedience to God's Word, he would have said exactly that. And he didn't. Maturity means we take the Law (all of God's Word) filled with the Spirit, and do it with a new, whole, soft heart of flesh. When we do this, we don't need to be told every little move to make. We already know what our Father wants, by heart.

Some people think and teach that if we have the Christ, then we "don't need the Law" (there's that lucky rabbit's foot again). "Having Christ" to these teachers' means to like Him a lot. Or 'believe' without action. Or to think that He's a great teacher or prophet and nothing more. There's a technical term for the "we don't need the Law" teaching, which is 'horse hockey.' If we have the Christ, we have God, and we get God's Words, including the Law. If we reject the Law, we are rejecting God's Word to His people, which would show that we do not 'have Christ.' It's a package deal.

If we say we "have Christ" yet do not do what the Christ says, then we are nothing more than clashing gongs and clanging cymbals (1 Corinthians 13:1). And that not even in time with God's music. When we pick and choose through the Word for what we will do and what we won't, it does not jive with the example that Jesus set. He did it all, and perfectly. He expects us to do the same. And 'perfectly' means confessing and repenting when we make mistakes instead of looking for excuses or rationalizing.

We need to understand that the Law still functions as a tutor to lead a person to the Christ. It tutors anyone on their way to maturity with God. This means that God still uses it to draw people to His Son, and by living it, we can draw people to Him, too.

Further, the Laws do not go away just because we are now old enough or 'have Christ.' When I was a child I learned not to stick the wrong object into an electrical socket. But when I 'grew up' that law did not cease to be. I just 'graduated' to the proper use of the socket without having to be told. I still don't stick the wrong object in the socket. In the same way, when we 'graduate' to Christ, the Law functions as it should. It's just that I don't need to be told. It is written on my heart. Having reached maturity, the Law does not cease to function. Instead, it is written on my heart so that I do what it says automatically. The Law becomes 'second nature.'

*Produces the fruit of the Spirit.* In Galatians Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit in contrast to the deeds of the flesh. It is obvious that he is contrasting two different types of actions, not feelings or intentions. Fruit is real, concrete action coming from inside.

<sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. <sup>19</sup>Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions,

factions, <sup>21</sup>envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5:18-25 NASB95)

Remember that verse 18 should read “you are not under law” rather than “you are not under the Law.” To tweak it a little so the meaning is plainer, we might say, “You are not operating by a legal relationship.” The “deeds of the flesh” are actions, and so is the “fruit of the Spirit.” If we are ‘under the Spirit’ (a grace relationship) then we act like it and continue to act like it. This includes following every one of His Words.

The church trains people to see the fruit of the Spirit and obedience to the Law as two different things, when in reality they go hand in hand. You cannot have the Spirit without the Law, and you cannot properly do what God instructs without the Spirit (Ezekiel 11:19-20). This is the ‘heart’ of the new covenant.

<sup>26</sup>“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:26-27 NASB95)

There are people who try to follow laws without the Spirit. This is the essence of legalism – perform an action and demand to be accepted by God because of it. There are other people who regard themselves as spiritual but ignore God’s Law. This leads one to inquire just exactly what sort of spirit energizes them.

We should not seek a legal relationship with Him anyway because like I already said, we don’t have a case. He sent His Son to die for us because He loved us, not because He had to, and not because our ‘righteous’ actions required it or something. John 3:16 is about God’s love translated into action in the giving of His Son. It is not about sentiment.

When God took up residence in the Tabernacle, it wasn’t because Israel had done everything right (Deuteronomy 9:4-6). It was because He loved Israel and wanted to make them into a great nation who knew their God in a personal, loving way. Love causes loving actions, and loving actions are a result of love, whether one ‘feels’ love or not. Love is action. Action is fruit. You don’t have to feel it; you just have to do it. Feelings will come later.

Faith is trust and obedience, with love mixed in, around and through. Love is greater than faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13) but it does not stand on its own. Neither do faith nor hope. We do not fracture faith, hope and love into sections and get them piecemeal. They are part of God’s whole package to us. All of them work together to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit, and the Law provides the framework.

*He’s in there.* Some of you may remember a TV commercial in the 70’s with an Italian lady by the name of Anna Maria Alberghetti (I think). She advertised some brand of spaghetti sauce (I forget which one), telling us that all kinds of good stuff was “in there.” Somebody would ask her if a certain spice was in it, and she’d say, “It’s in there.” Paul sort of says the same

thing. He tells us another blessing of the Law is that the Messiah's glory is "in there." This is why Moses had to put a veil over his face.

<sup>7</sup>But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, <sup>8</sup>how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? <sup>9</sup>For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. <sup>10</sup>For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. <sup>11</sup>For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. <sup>12</sup>Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, <sup>13</sup>and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. <sup>14</sup>But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. <sup>15</sup>But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; <sup>16</sup>but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2 Corinthians 3:7-16 NASB95)

The reason for the veil was the glory Moses had seen, and the glory was Jesus. In Moses' time the law wasn't fading, it had just been given. What was fading was the glory of the Messiah that he had seen in the Law. The glory of Jesus had to be veiled because the minds of the people were hardened (verse 14). They did not want to obey, and they did not love God. The veil is removed when someone turns to the Christ, so the glory in the Law (Jesus) can be seen.

People teach perverse things about the Law because their hearts are hardened, and when they read the Law, the veil remains. It is only when we humble ourselves (or accept humbling by God) and obey, that God transforms the tablet of our heart from stone to flesh. Then the Spirit can write the new covenant on it (2 Corinthians 3:3). What is written is the Law of God (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and because the Spirit writes and the heart responds in love, the letter does not kill (2 Corinthians 3:6).

*An effective mirror.* Paul calls the Law a mirror, and says if we look into this mirror, we are transformed by the glory of Jesus in the Law.

<sup>18</sup>But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB95)

According to Paul, the glory of Jesus, which is in the Law that Moses gazed into also, is transforming us as we gaze with unveiled face (without a hard heart). We turn to the Christ and the veil is removed. James says the Law is like a mirror.

<sup>23</sup>For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup>for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. <sup>25</sup>But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become

a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.  
(James 1:23-25 NASB95)

James' mirror and Paul's mirror are the same. It is the "perfect law," and the "law of liberty;" the whole absolute Word of God. James is just a little more specific. He mentions being an effectual doer of the law. Not just a lookie lou. It doesn't do enough good just to look. We have to copy what we see to make the changes complete. Both Paul and James convey the very real idea that the law helps us see ourselves as we are (another reason we're not real comfortable with it). The glory of Jesus in the law accurately reflects His image and shows us what we are. He gives us the reflection we need to guide the change in our ways.

*Our foundation.* Without the Law, we build on a shaky foundation (like building a house on sand). We also find whole chunks of the New Testament more obscure and harder to understand. However, head knowledge alone of the Tanakh is not enough. We need to read it and do it, like we are eating His body and drinking His blood. Accepting His will as expressed in the Law requires humility, and humility brings understanding.

3 Seek the Lord, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances;  
Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the  
Lord's anger. (Zephaniah 2:3 NASB95)

Submitting to God's will, including the part of His will revealed in the Law, amazingly adds to, and enhances, the understanding of God's whole plan and purpose. When the Law begins its work in the believer, the whole Word of God becomes easier to understand and follow. Something about humble submission to the Word imparts an ability to understand it better.

6 "So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? 8 "Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? 9 "Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. (Deuteronomy 4:6-9 NASB95)

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever. (Psalm 111:10 NASB95)

18 Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law. (Proverbs 29:18 ESV)

*It's love.* Speaking of immersion and submission, Jesus says that His disciples abide in

His love by doing what God says.

23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.

24 "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (John 14:23-24 NASB95)

9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (John 15:9-10 NASB95)

According to Jesus, God's word (or Law) is the same as Jesus' words. There are not two different words for two different peoples. The words we hear from Jesus are the Father's words, and Jesus speaks what God tells Him to speak. So we abide in the love of the Father and the Son when we take in what they say and do it. Love is the aim of everything a believer does. As we do what He says, He makes His abode (or 'abides') with us, and we abide in love with each other.

4 I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. 5 Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. 6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. (2 John 4-6 NASB95)

'The beginning' that James speaks of is not the alleged 'beginning of the church' but the beginning in the Garden. 'His commandments' are not some abbreviated or changed version of the Law, but the eternal Law itself. God's Law to love one another has always been around; it just hasn't always been followed. The message has always been "walk in it."

Remember that when Jesus says to eat His body and drink His blood (John 6:50-58) He is saying that hearing and doing is like partaking of Him. Each time we obey a command, we make another connection to God and to each other. It is like the food we eat distributed to every cell in our body, keeping our life going. The more we bring in what He says to daily living, the more it helps us 'take every thought captive.'

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NASB95)

It doesn't matter if the Testament is old or new, there is an implied obligation—not from fear but from love. It is not lip-service, nor is there a 'take it or leave it' option. The whole-Bible Christian is 'obliged' to follow God's Words in their completeness because God gives us so much love. It is reasonable to love God back by giving Him obedience with all of our heart, mind

or soul, and strength. In view of His love and sacrifice for us, it doesn't make any sense to ask, "Do I *have* to follow the Law?"

18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (1 John 3:18-24 NASB95)

*It's Worship.* This is a good place to talk about the blessing of worship. If you look in the Word (gee, what a concept!) worship is generally spoken of in connection with doing what God says. Worship, obedience, and blessing go hand in hand with humility and truth.

23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24 NASB95)

8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.' " (Luke 4:8 NASB95)

*Worship is service.* We worship or serve God when we do what He says. Obedience is the most basic form of worship, and the one form that He desires above all others. There is no grey area. We are either for Him or against Him. "For he who is not against us is for us." (Mark 9:40 NASB95)

We cannot roll around on the ground, sing songs with tears, give money, or speak in mysterious languages, yet ignore His Word, and then expect those histrionics will be acceptable worship. We may 'acquire the fire' but it won't keep going without love to fuel it.

If you had a child that spoke of how wonderful you were as a parent, then went out and behaved in ways that displeased you, would you think the way they spoke about you was genuine? If you had a spouse that spoke of devotion to your face, but behind your back was getting in bed with dozens of other people, would you think the devotion was genuine? God is not so stupid either.

Many times Israel is chastised by God because their worship of Him consisted of mere lip service. They would 'go through the motions' of sacrificing, then do things that were directly against what God had commanded. The church has not escaped the same fault, nor will we escape the same judgment if we continue in it. Worship of God was and is always to be done with a whole heart in every action. Loving the Lord includes all our heart soul and strength.

17But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18 NASB95)

Worship can include singing or what have you, but for these outward expressions to be genuine they will be coupled with an inside condition of obedience. They spring from a right relationship with God. When we obey God in the smallest area, it is worship. In this way, we can worship Him minute by minute by following as many of the commands as we can. We don't need a special building with a special music team and special leaders. We don't have to have 'worship music' on the radio or something either. We don't need signs and wonders. Obedience is the key to worship; it's a living sacrifice (that Romans 12:1-2 section again).

Are we also glad of heart in the doing? Sure. Obeying God imparts life and brings forth joy on a regular basis, and we express this joy in song. Are we thankful? Oh yeah, especially when we think about all He has done for us. But worship is as regular as breathing, and is not limited to a few songs on Sunday or grace before a meal.

9For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. (2 Corinthians 2:9 NASB95)

It cracks me up when we sing songs in the church, with subjects that sound godly, but then we refuse to actually do what we sing. "Anywhere you go I'll follow;" at least till we get out the door. He makes a right turn and we make a left.

I like music – I play drums and guitar. I enjoy 'rocking out' on occasion (most drummers are a little nuts). My CD collection would get me thrown out of a lot of churches. The sad thing is, I've been part of music teams that said music was an offering to God, yet refused to offer their best effort in practicing or showing up on time. I've been barred from other music teams because I wasn't 'holy' enough. Others told me I couldn't produce a 'spirit' of worship in a fashion acceptable to them (I'm not big on endless repetitions, Matthew 6:7). I've been hammered for playing 'secular' music, whatever that means, and rejected for playing, and not playing, hymns.

As a matter of fact, my perspective is that there is a lot of ungodliness in the music programs of most of the visible church. It's amazing that any part of it comes together in such a way as to please God at all. Much less make it acceptable to Him as 'worship.' It might please the people who are doing it, but I wouldn't expect it to please God. Not any more than sacrifices mixed with iniquity (Isaiah 1:10-17).

*Trains our hearing.* The more we follow the written form of God's ways, the better we can hear when He speaks to us outside of the Word. In other words, if we don't pay attention to what He already said, how would we hear it if He told us something additional? For instance, if we ignore His word on what we eat, how would we hear His response when we prayed for healing? He is our physician and healer, and He gives us preventative medicine in His Law.

He doesn't always answer our prayers with miraculous cures. Sometimes He just has to tell us to stop being stupid about what we stick in our mouths. If we don't listen to His prescription, we'll just keep getting sick. Some preach the opposite – eat whatever we feel like, then pray for a miracle when we get sick. If it doesn't work, then it must be your fault. You don't have enough of some mystical ingredient they call faith. Well, duh. But the reason the faith isn't working is that we are ignoring the obedience part in the first place!

Our hearing gets sharper when we practice listening to His written word. We have to develop the spiritual ‘hearing muscles’ of humility and obedience. We get used to the sound of His voice from the Word, so we can automatically distinguish His voice from all the other chatter around us. Just like a young child can tell the difference between mom’s voice and others in a crowded room. When He speaks directly to us, the character of what He says will match the character of His written word, and we pick it up by association. The Law trains us in righteousness so that rightness always stands out for us no matter where we see it or hear it.

*Helps prayer.* The training in righteousness from following His Word assists in discerning what to pray for and when. I’m convinced it improves communication with God.

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (James 5:16 NASB95)

<sup>29</sup>The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous. (Proverbs 15:29 NASB95)

Some think that Jesus provides righteousness to such an extent that we do not need to practice right behavior ourselves. This is a misunderstanding of the Word. It is clear that God does not hear the prayers of sinful people. The exception is if it is His will for His purpose. Or if it is a prayer of humble repentance and request for forgiveness.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>12</sup>“There they cry out, but He does not answer Because of the pride of evil men.

<sup>13</sup>“Surely God will not listen to an empty cry, Nor will the Almighty regard it. (Job 35:12-13 NASB95)

<sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. (John 9:31 ESV)

Sin is like a cloud between us and the sun of God’s love, or like one of those loud, thumping stereos that drowns out conversation. We need to remove it with confession and repentance (or a really big hammer in the case of the stereo) before He will do much else for us. The Law outlines righteous behavior. Sin, as we have already seen, is transgression of the Law. Ignoring His Law causes Him to ignore us.

Perhaps this is why so many are sick and dying in the church.<sup>8</sup> Remember; before sin entered the world there was no sickness or disease. A person may get sick through no direct fault of their own (John 9:1-7). Perhaps it is a test from God. But sickness in general is due to the presence of sin. God is our healer, and righteousness His prescription.

*Putting on Christ.* The church frequently comes up short when teaching how to do the things God wants us to do. The popular question asking “What would Jesus do?” is as much an admission of ignorance as it is a motivating interrogative. I’ve heard all sorts of strange, subjective advice such as, “allow Jesus to be the person in you that He wants you to be.” Another

<sup>7</sup> See Jeremiah 7:16 and the context, where God refuses to hear prayer due to idolatry.

<sup>8</sup> See Exodus 23:25-27; Deuteronomy 7:15, 28:58-61; 2 Chronicles 6:28-33; 1 Corinthians 11:27-32; Revelation 2:22-23.

was ‘quit, confess, face,’ which was trying to match the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Still another was, “actively yield.” Huh? What in the world do these things mean, anyway? They are confused and incomplete mush because they come from pagan mystical principles. It’s like listening for the sound of one hand clapping. The average person cannot walk with Him using this kind of drivel.

In contrast, Paul in Romans 13:8-14 speaks about how to “put on Christ.” He uses examples from the Law, and reminds us that love is part of the equation. We “fulfill” (fill up full) the Law as we “lay aside the deeds of darkness” and follow His instructions in love. Step by step we “put on Christ” when we do the things He did, in the same way He did them.

Doing His Law fills a person with the Word, and the Word has the authority to make the changes needed. When I started obeying all of His instructions in my life, I got a better handle on my temper. Now things don’t bug me like they used to. I have more peace than I ever had under lame, anti-law teachings. The best that can be hoped for with most current church dogma is to cover up something like an anger problem. But a cork is just not a good substitute for change.

You might not realize it because you haven’t tried it, but avoiding pork and shellfish, for instance, has a positive effect on gaining control of the emotions such as anger. As I practice this command, I am more aware of what I eat. The more aware I become, the more I put His instructions into effect everywhere. This keeps me mindful of His Word. Since His Word is ever in my mind as I choose my food, His Word is present when I begin to feel anger also. The same determination to avoid eating things that are not food helps to infuse my spirit with peace and produces more patience. Anger disappears or is channeled more properly. Plus I become more aware of hypocrisy, in that it doesn’t make sense to control what I eat and not control what’s more important. I know it sounds funny, but try it and you’ll see what I mean after a while.

*Restores the integrity and centrality of God’s Word.* Integrity means ‘wholeness.’ The integrity of the Word has been broken to such an extent that it is often ineffective. Just like breaking a sentence into individual letters eliminates meaning. We have a tendency to look at God as if He were fractured and pieced out too, so we don’t get a good idea of who He is and what He can do.

If the Word is put back together and placed in a central role in the believer’s life, we recover the idea that He hasn’t changed. Since we know His Word hasn’t changed, we know He will do all He said He would do. We can rest in Him because we know He isn’t fractured, pieced out, or schizophrenic. Whole Bible belief and practice puts it all back together, so we get a better and more complete picture of everything God is and will do.

*What’s The Big Deal?* Besides, what is the big deal with doing what our Father says, even in minor details? A few holidays, what we stick in our mouths, and some clothing choices don’t seem like all that huge of an issue, do they? No, they aren’t. What does make a big difference, however, is our attitude about God’s Word. Either it is all important or none of it is.

We can’t get all mystical about ‘Christ lives in us’ then ignore the things He commanded us. At least not and have an effective walk with Him. If we keep making excuse after excuse to dodge His Word, we will miss out on life and that more abundantly. We will also continue to present a hypocritical and cracked-up picture of our Father to others. We end up driving the rest of the world away from what they desperately need also.

Doesn’t Dad (the Father) have a right, nay, a fatherly responsibility, to tell us what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, what is ‘clean’ and ‘unclean?’ How else should our Father deal with His children? Birth them into new creations and then leave them by the side of the road? Give ‘em a few vague instructions like “love your God and neighbor” and then let ‘em

go off by themselves? That doesn't make any sense at all.

God loves us and provides guidance for growing and strengthening the Life that He gives us. We can love Him back by adoring every Word He speaks and scrambling to put it everywhere in our lives that it belongs. Isn't it wonderful that we have something like His Law to tell us where the boundaries are, where we should go and where we shouldn't go?

God never intends for His people to stand in one place once we gain right standing with Him. He wants us to move, and the beginning of our movement should be in taking on all of His ways as spelled out in His Law. It is the best discipleship system ever designed, and is guaranteed to produce fruit that is pleasing to God.

The Holy Spirit uses it to tutor us in the way we should go, and when we get 'all grown up,' it still functions to guard and protect. His Word is the foundation on which we can build a house that honors Him in every area. His Law is love in action, and through it, we learn how to love Him and how to love others as well.

As we obey each command, we touch our Lord and Master and Friend, and He touches us. From this flows worship, thanksgiving, praise and testimony to His provision and blessed love. It is no big deal to incorporate all of God's requirements for holy living, because He doesn't ask very much of us. As our Father, of course, He's not going to leave us hanging after making us new creations. He shepherds us with tender loving care, making boundaries and warning us away from dangerous situations.