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The Disciple's Faith and Good Works



Genuinely Following Jesus - Steve Gregg

In this lecture, Steve Gregg discusses the essential aspects of a disciple's faith and good works. He emphasizes that faith always informs behavior and that obedience to God is an essential condition of salvation. Gregg also distinguishes between legalism and obedience, pointing out that good works are a fruit of a disciple's faith and not the condition of salvation. He argues that Christians should focus on obeying God rather than following traditional rules and neglecting more important matters.

Transcript

Tonight we have the sixth lecture in a series that I'm doing on discipleship, Genuinely Following Jesus, what it means to be a disciple. And in this night's lecture, we're going to be talking about the disciple's faith and good works. And these are two subjects that both are taught very clearly in the Bible, but which are not very clear in the minds of Christians.

Christians either are a little overbalanced in the area of good works or overbalanced in the area of faith without works. Now, some might say, well, how can you be overbalanced in the area of faith without works? Certainly we're justified by faith, and that's true. The Bible says we're justified by faith and not by works.

But in these lectures, we're not really talking about justification. We're talking about discipleship. We're talking about what it means to follow Jesus.

And following Jesus is what you do after you're converted, what you do every day of your life. And good works are certainly mentioned in Scripture as having a very high place in the Christian life. But since people often just hear good works mentioned in contrast with faith, as if these are two opposing principles, I felt it's important for us to understand how faith and good works both apply to the normal life of discipleship, according to Jesus and the rest of the Scripture.

So that's what we're going to be talking about tonight. First of all, I want to define faith. And I don't know if this is going to be legible from the distance there.

The screen's not real large. But what is faith? Well, faith is, first of all, trusting in God's character. Faith is just trusting in God, trusting in his character.

It is not a force. It is not stuff that some people have a lot of and other people only have a little of. And some people think faith is simply trusting God and we trust God because we trust his character.

If somebody has integrity, then it is safe to trust them. And if you know that they have integrity, then you automatically trust them. You trust them effortlessly.

But if somebody does not have integrity, it is not safe to trust them. And if you know they don't have integrity, then you really can't trust them. You might wish you could, but you can't.

Every time they tell you something, you know they might be lying because they don't have any integrity. And Christian faith is simply making that correct judgment of God's character. That God is faithful, that God is honest, God does not lie, God can be trusted.

That's what faith is, alright? But it's, of course, faith in some very specific things about God's character. First of all, that God is in control of everything, what we would call his sovereignty. God has the power to do and the right to do whatever he wants to do.

When you become a Christian, that is the first thing you have to come to grips with. That it's no longer you in charge. It's no longer your happiness that is the goal.

It's no longer your rights that are going to be the issue. It is God's rights. It's God's prerogatives.

It's the fact that God owns you. God owns everything. And as such, he has every right to command and to control.

That's what the sovereignty of God means. That God is the creator of everything, and therefore he has all the rights to do whatever he may wish to do. In Romans 9.21, Paul said, does not the potter have power over the clay? And what he means by that is that the potter owns the clay and has every right to do with it what he wishes to do.

And Paul goes on, of course, in that passage to talk about how the thing that is made can't say to the one who made it, why have you made me like this? Why not? Because the thing that is made doesn't have any really right of appeal to the potter. The potter is the owner. The potter has all the prerogatives.

The potter is the sovereign over the clay, and so is God. And we trust that. When we come to faith in Christ, we acknowledge that fact as being a true fact.

We embrace that as one of our beliefs. Secondly, we trust in his benevolence. Now, it's one thing to say, I know that God is in control of everything.

It's another thing to say, and I'm glad of it. Because some people know that God's in control, but they're not real happy with God. They're not sure he's really on their side.

Remember the story of Ruth as she came back with Naomi from their exile in Moab. They came back to Bethlehem and the people said, oh, is this Naomi coming home again? And she said, don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara.

Now, you know, the word Naomi means pleasantness. Mara means bitterness. She says, don't call me pleasantness.

I don't want to be pleasant anymore. I call me bitterness because she said, because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me. Now, see, she had lost her husband and two sons while she was in Moab.

That's pretty bitter providences. And she recognized it was God who had done it. She says, the Lord has dealt bitterly with me.

She recognized God's sovereignty, but she wasn't so happy with God's sovereignty. She wanted to be bitter about it because she wasn't convinced of his benevolence. That is, that he's really on your side.

Is he? If he is, then that's a wonderful thing to know that the one who really is in control of everything is also the one who's committed to doing everything for you that's good for you. But if you know that God is sovereign and you're not so sure he's good, then you say, where was God when 9-11 happened? Where was God when Katrina hit? Where was God when the tsunami came? Where was God when Chile was hit by an earthquake? Where was God? And what people are often saying is, OK, God, he's the big guy. He should be in charge of these kinds of things.

Can he answer for himself? Where was he? Why wasn't he doing the right thing? That's what they're implying. But you see, if you have faith in God, you know that God not only has the right to do what he wants to, but he always does the right thing, that what he does is always for the good, especially of those who trust in him, as Paul said in the most well-known verse, probably, in Romans 8-28, where Paul said, when we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose, well, if we're his people, then everything works together for our good. His providences are benevolent toward us, even the ones that seem harsh, even the ones that seem bitter.

But their intentions are for our good, and potentially we can benefit from everything God does if we respond in faith. Of course, if we're not trusting that he's good, we get bitter, like Naomi. And instead of benefiting from our trials, we don't get better, we get bitter.

And so this is something that is an essential part of our faith in God. We believe he's in charge. We also believe he's good and benevolent.

We also trust in his integrity, and his integrity, by that we mean he tells the truth. And of course, the upshot of that is if he says something, we believe it, because he tells the truth. If somebody is honest, by definition, they tell the truth.

God is honest. God is faithful. Faithful means trustworthy.

When he speaks, his words are faithful. He can be trusted. Now these three things are aspects of the character of God that are all essentials to the disciple's faith.

The person who becomes a disciple of Jesus has to trust in God in these areas. That God is going to take care of things, because he can. That God is on your side, he's benevolent.

And that God will tell you the truth, and he won't lead you astray. Those are all simply, that's like a child's faith in his father, isn't it? Like a child's faith in his parents. He believes his dad can do anything.

He's never afraid when his dad's around, if he's a little kid. When he gets bigger, he's not so sure, but when he's a little kid, he's sure that his dad can take care of any danger. He knows his dad is going to take care of anything, because his dad loves him, and he believes what his dad says when he asks him all kinds of questions, like why is the sky blue? His father may give the most inane answer, but the child believes that his dad knows and tells the truth.

And that's really what our faith in God is. It's just like a childlike faith in our father. So, we read in Titus 1.2, Paul, picking up in the middle of the sentence, he says, In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.

God, who cannot lie. That's why we trust him, because he can't lie. Now, faith is, as I said, trusting in God's character, in these areas we just discussed, but also faith, Christian faith, is believing what God has said about Jesus.

And God has said that Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is Savior. Now, faith is in things that you can't see, remember. It says that in Hebrews 11.1, that faith is the evidence of things not seen.

We do not see heaven. We do not see a throne. We do not see Jesus sitting on a throne.

Stephen saw that just before he died, as he was being stoned. He had a vision. He saw Jesus actually wasn't sitting on the throne.

Jesus stood up to receive the martyr into heaven. But usually, Jesus is sitting down at the right hand of God. And we don't see that.

I've never seen that. But God has said it's true. God's word says that Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, where he's been given all power and all

authority.

And he's the King of kings and Lord of lords. So, he is the Lord. We believe that because we've been told that.

He's also the Savior. That's another thing we can't see completely, because salvation includes the forgiveness of sins, which is invisible. If I say now, if you will repent, God will forgive your sins.

And so you say, OK, and I repent. Did he forgive your sins? Yes. How do you know? Well, I guess because he said so.

I just have to believe him when he says that. He says that Jesus saved me. I believe it.

He says, Jesus, Lord, I believe it. Now, these are the components of Christian faith, the disciples' faith. It's faith in the character of God, and it's faith in the declarations of God, concerning, of course, Christ, especially who is the central object of the Christian faith.

And so we need to understand next that when we have faith in anything, whether it's Christian faith or any other kind of faith, faith always informs behavior. People always act on their faith. If you have a stockbroker that you trust, he says, quick, buy this stock.

You take all your money out of the bank and you put it in there. Why? Because you believed him. And sometimes it's safe and sometimes it's not safe to believe such things.

But the point is, if you believe, you act. That's simply human nature. And all people have faith.

They just don't all have faith in God. If you don't have faith in God, you must have faith either in yourself or in somebody else or in some resource that you have, some ace in the hole that you think you have, some money in the bank or something, your insurance. There's something there that you feel you can fall back on.

And that is what your trust is in. And the Christians trust is in God. If people are not Christians, they have to trust in something else because human beings are creatures of faith.

They cannot live without trusting in something. Why? Because if you don't trust in something, you will know nothing except what you have seen and experienced with your own eyes and ears and so forth. And how limited is that? If you could not trust what you're told by your teachers and by the newspapers and so forth, you'd be living in a world that's as small as your experience.

You wouldn't know if there is such a place as Iraq because you've never been there. You wouldn't know if there's a war going on over there because you've never been there. Now, someone might tell you, someone you know maybe over there and says, yeah, I'm

over here in Iraq and we're fighting a war.

But you wouldn't know it's true unless you believe them. That's faith. You have to trust them because you don't experience it yourself.

And so everybody lives by faith or else they live in a very, very narrow world. Human beings can't live in such a narrow world. And so they all have faith.

We all have faith. What Christianity calls to do is put that faith in God. Now, once we have our faith in these things that Christians believe, that informs our behavior as everybody's faith informs their behavior.

If you believe that you only go around once in life and you better grab all the guts so you can. If that's your philosophy and you believe that, well, people will be able to tell that that's your philosophy because that's what you'll be doing. You'll be putting your own, you know, hedonism ahead of every other priority.

But if you believe that Jesus is the Lord, that God has set him at God's right hand, and that he has given all authority, then obedience to him is going to be what you're going to do because you believe it, if you do. I don't know if you're listening to the radio program today, but someone called and he was concerned. He's in Oregon.

He's concerned about his sister who he said is a Christian, but she's living with her boyfriend. She has a child by a previous relationship and now she has another. I think she's maybe pregnant by this boyfriend too, but she's a Christian.

He says he doesn't want to make her feel condemned or anything like that. And whenever I talk to someone like that, it's awkward for me because I don't like to be the one to say, you know, your sister isn't a Christian, you know, your sister is not saved. But what can you say on the strength of what the Bible says? If you believe that Jesus is Lord, then you don't live in, you know, deliberate sin.

If you sin, it's because of weakness. It's because of failure. But you repent because you don't want to sin.

But someone who lives in a life of sin without repentance, how can it be said that they believe that Jesus is Lord? Your faith will inform your behavior. And in the case of believing that Jesus is the Lord and Jesus is the Savior, the particular response in our behavior is one of gratitude for him being our Savior and submission to him because he's our Lord. If you do not have gratitude toward him and do not live your life out of gratitude to God, then you don't believe what he said about Jesus being your Savior.

Or at least you have not grasped it. If you don't submit to him, then you don't believe he's the Lord. You can say it all you want to.

But Jesus said, not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Why? Because if you say he's Lord, that means he's the one you obey. The word Lord is a word that is related to a coordinate word called servant.

And if you say, Jesus is my Lord, you're in the same statement. Without any more words, you're already saying, I am his servant. And he says, why do you call me Lord, Lord? And you don't do what I say.

So clearly, submission to him is the obvious response to someone who really believes he's the Lord. Now, since faith informs our behavior, I want to tell you in three ways that it informs our behavior with reference to obedience. First of all, faith informs us that it is right to obey God.

It's the right thing to do. He deserves it, in other words. If something is the right thing to do, it means if you don't do it, it's wrong.

You're violating somebody's rights. It's wrong to murder. Why? Because you're violating someone's right to life.

It's wrong to steal. Why? Because you're violating someone's right to their property. It's wrong to slander.

Why? Because you're violating somebody's right to their good reputation. People have rights. Now, of course, Christians are often called to lay down their rights.

For others, that's a Christian virtue. But that doesn't mean people don't have rights. When I'm not looking, when we're done here, if you came up and folded up my computer and took it home with you, without my permission, that'd be wrong.

Why? Because this is my computer. I have property rights to it. You don't.

And so if you took it without my permission, you're stealing. Now, on the other hand, if you said, Steve, could I have your computer? I'd say, well, I really like that computer. But you say, but I really need it.

And I say, OK, you can have it. Then I've given up my rights to it. I can do that.

That's a Christian virtue. But for you just to take it is not OK, because there are rights. And if you violate somebody's rights, you've done the wrong thing.

It is right to obey God because he deserves it. He has the right to be obeyed. That's what the word authority means.

When Jesus said all authority in heaven and earth belongs to me, authority means the right to be obeyed. That's the meaning of the word. So if you have this faith in the

Lordship of Christ, then you know that it's right to obey him.

In Matthew 28, 18 through 20, Jesus said, all authority has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples, teaching them to observe all things I've commanded you. Teaching people to do what Jesus commanded is the natural upshot of believing that all authority has been given to him.

If somebody's in authority and they give commands, you do what they say. If someone gives commands and you don't do it, it's because you're not acknowledging their authority. You say, you're not my boss.

But if they are your boss, then you do it because they have authority. In Luke 6, 46, Jesus said, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you do not do the things which I say. In Acts 5, 29, Peter and the other apostles answered the Sanhedrin and said, we ought to obey God rather than men.

We ought to because why? It's the right thing to do. Whenever you ought to do something, it's because that's the right thing to do. Not the convenient thing necessarily, not the thing you prefer, but it's the thing you ought to do.

Because it's right. So our faith informs us that obedience to God is the right thing, it's right to obey. Secondly, our faith informs us that it's pleasing to God that we obey.

Now this is a very important thing because some Christians are not as motivated by this as I think all Christians should be. A lot of people, when they at least profess to become Christians, all they're thinking about is their own escape from hell. You know, someone told them there's a God, someone told them there's a judgment, someone told them there's a heaven and hell.

Someone said you need to repent and follow Jesus or else you go to hell. They say, okay, where do I sign up? And so all they've even thought about is how do I save my sorry skin? They're not thinking about God's rights, they're thinking about my preferences. I want to be saved, I don't want to be lost.

Well, there is salvation. We are saved and not lost if we're followers of Christ. But that is hardly the focus of the New Testament.

The focus of the New Testament is that God is our maker and our redeemer. He has purchased us after making us. He owns us doubly.

And we should be concerned primarily about whether He is happy with what He's made. Not whether I'm happy about what's going on, but whether God is happy with me. So that even when I'm suffering, the important thing to me is to know, is God pleased with the way I'm going through my sufferings? Not, am I pleased to be suffering? And yet so many people, that's all they think about.

I'm suffering, where's God? I can't believe there's a God who let me suffer like this. Why not? Because you think salvation is all about you. And the Bible says, no, it isn't.

It's not even about you, it's about God. The reason God saved you is because He wanted you for Himself. Not because you deserved to be saved, but He wanted you.

And He has the right to get what He wants. And He has the right to be pleased with the things He made. And therefore, the Christian should be thinking, God made me, owns me.

There's nothing really important about my life, except that He's not disappointed with what He made. That He's pleased. Not because I'm afraid that He's going to be angry if He's disappointed.

My children disappoint me, but they're not afraid. They know I love them, they know I accept them unconditionally. But they still know that they should please me, and they feel badly when they don't.

They're good kids. And so, should Christians be good kids? We should realize that even if God accepts us unconditionally, it's still very important that He should be pleased. Not because things go badly for us if He isn't, but because things go badly for Him if He isn't.

He's missing out on what He wanted when He made you. And no Christian, who's a real Christian, could stand to think that I'm going to live my life, and God will not be pleased with what He got out of me. God will not be pleased with what He made when He made me.

And we know that it pleases God that we obey Him. 1 Samuel 15, 22, Samuel said to King Saul, Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. God has more delight that we obey Him than that we offer sacrifices.

And in this particular case, Saul had offered sacrifices in disobedience to God. And so he was actually rejected from being king on this occasion because of that. But it's because he did not take into account that God has pleasure in obedience more than sacrifice.

In 1 John 3, 22, John says, We keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Keeping His commandments is that which is pleasing to Him, pleasing His sight. And thirdly, faith informs us that it is safe to obey God.

Now, safe doesn't mean you won't die. Because many people die when they're obeying God. Jesus did.

Stephen did. All the apostles did. Many martyrs have died obeying God.

But that doesn't mean it wasn't safe. The world is not a safe place. You're only safe in

this world as God keeps you safe.

The safest thing He can do permanently is take you out of the world. Then there's no more danger at all. It is always safe.

That is to say, you will never look back finally and say, I regret that I obeyed God. Because the final chapter has been written and it was a disaster for me. Now, I will tell you, I've had some things in my life that I look at and they seem very disastrous.

But I don't think the final chapter has been written, frankly. And I believe, because I have faith, that what God has promised is true. That those who put their trust in Him will never be ashamed.

Will never have, in the final analysis, have any reason for regrets to having obeyed. Now, I do believe that I have regrets and will always have regrets about some decisions I've made that were stupid decisions. But obeying God is not one of them.

Obeying God is not a stupid decision. I've never had any regrets about obeying God. Although sometimes it's cost me a lot more than disobedience would have cost me.

But it's safe to obey God. And it's never safe not to. You might seem to get away with it.

That doesn't mean it's safe. There's always some consequence, even if it's the hardening of your own heart that happens. God forbid that if I disobeyed, I'd get away with it.

Because then my heart becomes hardened. I think, oh, I got away with it. Maybe I'll get away with it next time.

You know, the most merciful thing God can do is if you disobey, make sure you don't get away with it. So that you keep your conscience sensitive. But there's always some negative consequence for disobedience.

And faith tells us it is safe to obey God. In Isaiah 119, it says, If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. That's good.

It'll be good for you. If you're willing and obedient. In Jeremiah 38:20, he says, Please obey the voice of the Lord, which I speak to you, so it will be well with you and your soul shall live.

It's better for you to be obedient to God. So our faith informs us that it is right to obey and that it is pleasing to God that we obey and that it is safe to obey. If we believe those things, what are we going to do? We're going to obey.

We're going to obey. It's the right thing to do. It pleases God and it's safe.

Now you might say, well, there's one thing it doesn't, that's not included. You didn't say

faith tells you that it'll be fun to obey. And it's true.

It's not always fun to obey. And if fun is all you're into, then of course, then you won't obey even though these other things are true. But if fun is all you're into, you're not a Christian.

And we're talking about Christians. Christians are into Jesus. Everybody else is into self.

And that's why some people don't obey, because it's sometimes not fun to obey. Not as fun as disobedience can be. And so those who don't put Christ first and put self first, they go for the one thing.

It's no fun. Therefore, I won't obey. But when you become a Christian, you repent.

You're converted. You get a new heart. And suddenly, what pleases God matters more to you than what pleases you.

What's right matters more than what's fun. And so, what I'm saying is the Christian faith itself inspires obedience. Because it informs us that obedience is right and pleasing and is safe.

And it is, in every case, the right move. Now, in the Bible, interestingly enough, faith, which means believing, is sometimes contrasted with, not with unbelieving, but with disobedience. As if these are polar opposites.

Think about that. You'd think faith is the opposite of unbelief. Obedience is the opposite of disobedience.

But the Bible sometimes puts faith as the opposite of disobedience. Which means that faith implies obedience. And you can see this, for example, in 1 Peter 2, 7. Where Peter says, Therefore, to you who believe he is precious, but to those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

Notice, there's two categories that he's got in mind. There's those who believe, and then there's those who are disobedient. Presumably, those who believe are obedient then.

Likewise, in John 3, 36. John 3, 36. Now, this reads differently in some translations, but this is in the New American Standard, the English Standard Version, and the Greek-English Interlinear.

It reads like this. He who believes in the Son has eternal life. But he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

You would have thought it would say, He that believes will have eternal life, but he that does not believe will not see life. It says, He that believes will have eternal life, but he that does not obey will not see life. You can see that in the mind of the biblical writers,

faith, or believing, is consistent with obeying.

And the person who isn't a believer is the one who's disobedient. The person who's a believer is going to be obedient. That's, of course, the assumption throughout Scripture.

Now, how do we give this with the whole concern about legalism? You know, when you talk about good works and obedience and stuff, there's always a certain element in the Christian Church that says, That sounds like works to me. Well, that's right. We are talking about works.

That's exactly right. Good works. That's the subject, isn't it? Well, but that's legalism.

Well, is it? Is it legalism? You know, I heard a preacher say many years ago, and it stuck in my mind, he said, Most Christians are more afraid of the word holiness than they are of the word sin. They fear obeying God more than they fear sinning because they think that obeying God and holiness are heretical. They say that, you know, that's legalism.

We're saved by grace through faith, and therefore, you know, obedience and holy is God. I've actually heard people say that God is offended by our attempts to do good works. Anyone ever heard that? I've actually heard people who were waxing eloquent about grace and faith and so forth, go so far as to say, And if you even think to do good works, you're insulting God's grace.

Well, that person got a little more vehement than intelligent, and he wasn't remembering what his Bible said, or maybe he hadn't read it. But legalism is not the same thing as obedience. I want to show you what the difference is between legalism, on the one hand, and obedience.

Because one is bad. Legalism is bad. Legalism is a different religion.

It's not Christianity. If you're a legalist, you're not really a disciple. But what's the difference between that and this demand of obedience? Most people don't know any difference, so we'll consider that.

First of all, obedience is not legalism. It is, in fact, the essence of salvation. Obedience is the essence of salvation.

I didn't say that you are saved by obedience. I'm saying that the condition of salvation, once it is entered, is a condition which is essentially a condition of obedience. And so we have many scriptures that tell us so.

For example, 1 John 2, verses 3 and 4. Now, by this we know that we know Him. That is, we know we're saved. We know we know Jesus.

How? If we keep His commandments. That's obeying, isn't it? Keeping His commandments. This is how we know that we know Him.

If we keep His commandments. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments is a liar. And the truth is not in Him.

What's the lie then? Here's somebody who says, I know Jesus, but they're not obeying Him. He's a liar. Well, what do you say that's a lie? The lie he said was, I know Jesus.

If a person says, I know Him, and they don't obey Him, they don't know Him. And they're lying when they say they do. Now, this is a very significant statement of Scripture.

This Scripture alone would scandalize a huge percentage of the people who go to church today who think that they're going to church just to get a ticket to heaven for free. And they don't realize that obeying Jesus is in the deal. That He's the Lord.

You get a Savior, you get a Lord at the same time, because He's one guy, the Savior and Lord. And so, you get a Savior, but along comes a Lord with them, because He's both. In Acts chapter 5, in verse 32, Peter was saying to the Sanhedrin, we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.

Now, Peter is not saying, if you want to get the Holy Spirit, start obeying Him, and you'll earn the Holy Spirit that way. That's not what he's saying. He's saying, God has given His Holy Spirit to a class of people.

You know who they are? They're the ones who are obeying Him. Now, did He give them the Holy Spirit because they obeyed Him? No, He gave them the Holy Spirit before they began to obey Him. He gives you the Holy Spirit when you're born again.

You haven't really done much of anything yet in terms of obedience. But once you have the Holy Spirit, once you're a born-again Christian, you fall into the category of those who obey Him, because that's what you do. That's what saved people do.

When someone says, can I be saved and still live in sin? I say, saved from what? What does he want to be saved from? It says in Matthew 1, the angel said to Joseph about the child that Mary's going to have, he said, His name shall be called Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. He didn't say from the consequences of their sins. That's in there too.

But He came to save them from the bondage, the slavery. See, the Jews were looking for the Messiah to come and save them from the slavery of the Romans or whoever was oppressing them at any given time. The Messiah will come and He'll save us from what? From this oppression, from this slavery, from these overlords.

That's what the Messiah was supposed to do, they thought. And the angel said, well, no, actually, He's going to save you from a worse overlord than that. That's the oppressor of your life called sin.

You're a slave of sin. And He's going to save you from that. That's what salvation is.

Now, of course, along comes that, you also get justified and forgiven of your past sins. And the consequences of your sins that are waiting in the future are canceled as well. But the essence of being saved is that you've been saved from a life of sinning, a life of rebellion against God.

You're a changed person. You've got a new heart, a new spirit. You're born again.

And what you've been saved from is your sin. How can you say, well, I'm saved, I still live in my sin? Really? Can you ride two different horses going the opposite directions at the same time? You might as well try to and say, I'm saved from my sins, but I still live in my sins. Now, of course, Christians do sin.

But as I said earlier, they don't want to. And they don't sin habitually. They sin by weakness.

They sin by failure to do what they're really aiming at. What they're aiming at is to follow Jesus. But we're all weak.

And He knows our frame. He remembers that we're dust. He has not dealt with us according to our sins or rewarded us according to our iniquities.

So God knows our weakness. And when we do sin, He knows whether that's what we really wanted to do or whether that's something that really goes against what we really want to do. And many times, you might say, well, when I sinned, I think I kind of wanted to do it.

Well, there was, of course, part of you that did want to. Paul said, the flesh lusts against the spirit, the spirit lusts against the flesh. And these two are contrary to one another.

So you can't do what you want to do. Your flesh does want to sin. But if you're born again, you at your heart do not want to sin.

And you, even as you find yourself succumbing to temptation, there's something in you that doesn't feel quite comfortable with it. And if you do go ahead and do it, you really feel badly then. Because it was, it went against your grain as a Christian.

And if you can sin and not have it go against your grain, then you don't have the right grain. You see, because the Christian's grain is in the direction of obeying God. Sinning is against that grain.

If you can sin and it's not against your grain, then your grain's that way, not that way. And so, those who have received the Holy Spirit, those who are born again are those who, as a general rule and as a habit, obey him. It is their intention and therefore that's what they do most of the time when they're not falling, when they're not stumbling.

In Romans 15, 18, Paul, he said, For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me in word and deed to make the Gentiles obedient. That is, he's describing his ministry, all his words and deeds were toward this goal, to make the Gentiles obedient. Paul was a Jew and many of the Christians, the early Christians were Jews.

And when they came to Christ, they became obedient to their Messiah. And now Paul says, I'm going to go out and get those Gentiles and get them to be obedient to my Messiah too. That's the essence of getting them saved.

That's the essence of being a disciple. In 1 Peter 1, 13-14, Peter said, Rest your hope fully upon the grace. Now, he's a grace preacher, right? Rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ as obedient children.

Okay, so we're to rest our hope fully on grace and be obedient. Why is that? Grace is the basis of our relationship with God. It is the basis of our acceptance with God.

It's the basis of our being born again into the family of God. It's the basis of us being able to call God our Father. Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God, Peter said in 1 Peter 3-1.

And so grace and love and mercy, this is the basis of God's acceptance of us. But now he has accepted us. On what terms? We're his children now.

What are children supposed to do? They're supposed to obey. That's what children are supposed to do. The children who came into your home, assuming you had children, did not come there by their obedience.

They didn't do anything to get themselves there. You did it. You brought them into the world by your mercy and by your love for them and by your grace.

They're there unconditionally loved by you and brought there by your mercy, not by theirs. But they're still expected to obey. That's their role.

That's the role of children. They're born into a family. They have a father and a mother, and they're supposed to obey.

And that's what Peter says. Your hope is resting fully on grace and therefore be obedient children. No conflict between grace and obedience.

In fact, he assumes that one implies the other. In 1 Peter 13-14, Peter said, Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, you have purified your souls in obeying the truth. These people wouldn't have made very good Baptists, I think.

These apostles. Because they said too much about obedience. I pick on Baptists.

I'm a Baptist background. That's my background. There's a lot of churches they wouldn't be very welcome in, I think, because their theology is too, well, I guess too non-reformed or something like that.

You know, I mean, ever since Luther, we've decided that we're not allowed to have any works in our preaching, not allowed to have any obedience emphasized because then our credentials as a Protestant are suspect because it's the Catholics that are into the works thing. And if you say as much about works as the Bible says, well, you're suspect. You know, are you really a Protestant? You sure you're one of us? Well, how about if we just be Christians and follow what the apostles and Jesus said? What does the Bible say about those who don't obey? Remember, we're talking about how obedience is not legalism.

Obedience is the essence of salvation. And the Bible says about people who do not obey some very bad things. For example, Romans 2, 6-8.

Paul says, God will render to each one according to his deeds. He's talking about on the day of judgment. Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.

But those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteous indignation and wrath. So Paul says on the day of judgment, some people are going to get glory and honor and immortality. Other people are going to get indignation and wrath.

Really, what's the difference between these folks? The ones who get honor and immortality and glory, well, they're the ones who by continuance in doing good seek for these things. But those who get indignation and wrath, they're the ones who don't obey the truth, but they obey unrighteousness. Now Paul is not here contradicting his own teaching about by faith you are saved, by grace you are saved through faith, not of works, and so forth.

Paul teaches that very clearly in Romans as well as other places. Ephesians is where the verses I was just referring to, but Paul has verses in Romans and in Philippians and Colossians and Titus that say the same thing. Paul teaches we're not saved by works.

But he wasn't forgetting that for a moment when he wrote this passage in Romans. Because to Paul, he didn't see the conflict that modern Christians see between being saved by grace on the one hand and being required to obey on the other. Because he understood what James understood, that faith without works is dead.

If you say you have faith and it doesn't change the way you act, then you don't have faith. You can talk about faith, but you don't have it. And you've got to have it, not talk about it, to be saved.

In 2 Thessalonians 1 verses 7 and 8, Paul is talking about when Jesus returns. He says, When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who don't obey the gospel.

Obey the gospel? I thought the gospel was something to be believed. Well, if you believe it, what do you do then? If the gospel is Jesus is Lord, and you believe that, what do you do? Well, if you believe it, you obey. 1 Peter 4.17 says, For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

He means the church of God. And if it begins with us first, we're the house of God, and judgment begins with us first, what will the end be of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, there's us, and then there's those who don't obey. Peter takes it for granted that we do obey.

And if God has to judge us who are obedient, how much harder are those who don't obey? But you see, the Bible indicates there's great judgment to come on those who don't obey. Now, some people have said, Well, why does the Bible say we're saved by faith, but it never talks about the judgment? It talks about people being judged by works. It always does, by the way.

You look at any passage in the Bible about the judgment. Old or New Testament, the teaching of Jesus, or Paul, or Peter, or the Revelation. You take all the passages in the Bible about the judgment, and it always says this, They were judged everyone according to their deeds, or their works.

Every man receives the things done in his body. Everything, you know, the sheep and the goats, you know, you did it to the least of my brethren. You didn't do it to the least of my brethren.

It's what you did and didn't do. Your works. Every passage in the Bible about the judgment is, The works are going to be traipsed out there and looked at, and then the decisions are going to be made.

How can that be if we're saved by grace? Because the assumption of Scripture always is, If you are saved, it changes you. If the God who created the universe comes and lives inside your puny little body, the God that fills all the universe, He comes in there, you think that doesn't change anything? That changes everything. And because it changes everything, you live differently.

And therefore, the safest way for God to judge who really has faith and who really doesn't have faith, is to check out the works. Just bring out the works. Say, those are not the works of someone who has faith.

These are the works of someone who has faith. You see, faith and works are hand in

hand in the Scripture. So, obedience is not legalism.

Secondly, doing and advocating good works is not legalism. This is very important, because some people don't understand this. If you say, listen Christians, you need to do the right thing.

You need to obey God. You need to do good works. Some say, that's legalism.

Is it? Then Paul was a great legalist, and so was Peter and Jesus and a whole bunch of others. Paul said this in Titus 3.5, and we all agree with him, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. Through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Now, we were saved not by works of righteousness that we've done, Titus 3.5 says. But, having said that, Paul says a lot of other things about the importance of works. We're not saved by them, but they certainly have an important place.

Ephesians 2, 8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Now, that sounds a lot like what we just saw in Titus 3.5. Not by works of righteousness that we've done, according to His mercy He saved us. By grace through faith, not of works.

Okay? That's Paul. But the next verse that Paul writes is this. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared before Him, that we should walk in them.

So, Paul says, we're not saved by works, but we were created in Christ Jesus, when we were born again, we're a new creation. And what is it we're created for? For doing good works. That's what He created us for, he said.

Paul said that. Jesus said something like that. Matthew 5, 16 He said, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.

Jesus said, men should see you doing good works. And glorify your Father in heaven. 1 Peter 2, 12 Sounds almost like He's quoting Jesus on that.

Peter says, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works, which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Notice that. If they behold your good works, they'll glorify God.

That's what Jesus said in Matthew 5, 16. May they see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Peter obviously has that in mind.

You should have visible good works, or else God will not be glorified. People will glorify God when they see that Christians really are different. They really do stay faithful to their wives.

They really do pay their bills. They really do help other people out, rather than themselves. They really do lay down their lives sacrificially for the handicapped.

Christians do things that set them apart out of the love of Christ that is in their hearts. And people see that, and ultimately they'll glorify God. In Colossians 1, 10, Paul said that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Notice, being fruitful in every good work. Our lives should have good works, but he talks about it as being fruitful. Now, Paul does make a distinction between that which is produced by effort and labor, on the one hand, and that which is fruit of a tree.

There's a difference between, for example, the works of the flesh in Galatians 5, and the fruit of the Spirit. Fruit is produced naturally by the nature of the tree. If you have an orange tree, it will produce oranges, unless it's a sick or dead tree.

It's going to produce oranges. That's what they do by nature. Christians produce good works by nature.

It's the fruit. You're just being fruitful. You're just letting your new nature produce what your nature produces, fruit.

And he says you'll be fruitful in every good work. 2 Timothy 2.21, Paul says, Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the master, prepared for every good work. Well, there must be some good works we're supposed to do because we're supposed to get prepared to do them.

And if you cleanse yourself, you purge yourself, pull away from your old sinful habits, and make yourself useful to the master, you'll be prepared for every good work. Apparently, that's a good thing. In 2 Timothy 3.16-17, we all know this verse, I would hope.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. For what purpose? That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. That's why you have a Bible.

That's why there's scriptures. They're profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct. Why? So that you'll be equipped for every good work, which apparently you're supposed to be involved in.

In Titus 2.14, Paul said that Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people. Sounds like the salvation by grace that Paul talks about elsewhere. This is Paul again.

But he says his own special people who are zealous for good works. That's what Jesus

came to die for. He came to get himself a bunch of people who are zealous to do good works.

How can that be legalism if you're zealous for good works? And if that's what Jesus died to make out of you, to make you a person who's purified and zealous to do good works. Titus 3.1, Paul says, remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities and to obey, to be ready for every good work. Christians should be ready for every good work.

Titus 3.14, let our people also learn to maintain good works to meet urgent needs that they may not be unfruitful. Anyone get the impression Paul's in favor of good works? Again and again and again. By the way, the last several scriptures we just read extolling good works are in Titus, which also is the same book that where he said, not by works of righteousness that I've done, but according to his mercy, he saved me.

That's OK. I'm not saved by my good works, but then four or five times, six times actually in Titus, because he advocates the need for good works in the Christian life. So, either Paul's schizophrenic or these two are not in conflict with each other.

Notice in that verse, he said that they should maintain good works, meet urgent needs that they may not be unfruitful. Compare that with Colossians 1.10 that we saw a moment ago, being fruitful in every good work. The fruitfulness of the Christian life is the good works.

The fruit we produce are good works. That's what God's looking for from us. Hebrews 10.24 says, Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.

What we should be doing to each other is encouraging each other to love and to do good works. Unfortunately, if preachers or individual Christians tell another Christian to do good works, they'll be called illegalists. But the writer of Hebrews says, No, you need to be encouraging others to do good works.

Stir each other up to love and to good works. In Hebrews 13.20-21, Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well-pleasing in his sight. Hebrews 13.20-21. Philippians 2.12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now 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 do of his good pleasure. God works in you, and you work out. Your outworking of your life is good works.

Just like it said over here in Hebrews. That he'll make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you. God works in you, so that you work out your own salvation.

So, obedience is not legalism. Doing and advocating good works is not legalism. Also, well, let's talk about what legalism is.

What is legalism? Now, this is an interesting thing, because the Bible never uses the word legalism, or legalist. Christians use it all the time, and they should, it's a good word. But the Bible doesn't use the word.

And therefore, we can't just go to concordance, look up legalism, find all the verses, find out what it is. It's not in there. So, what do we mean when we say legalism? Well, Christians almost always mean one of the two following things.

It either means what the Pharisees were, or what the Judaizers were. Now, the Pharisees, of course, were the most strict adherents to the law and the traditions of the elders in Israel in the Jewish faith. And they, if anyone deserves to be called legalist, they do, they were, and they would be proud of it.

If you called them legalist, they'd say, yeah, what's the point? What's your issue with that? I am a legalist. That's because I'm obedient to God's law. You know, they were legalists.

Now, Jesus was not a legalist. And he had conflict with the Pharisees because of that. Then there are the Judaizers.

Now, the Judaizers were actually in the church. They were not the Pharisees, although some of them might have previously been, because some Pharisees did become Christians. But they might have become Judaizers, some of them.

Paul encountered the Judaizers wherever he went, well, especially in the early days. And he wrote a whole epistle against them. That's the Epistle of Galatians.

The Judaizers were the ones who were telling the young Christians they need to be circumcised and keep the ceremonial laws of Moses. In other words, they have to become Jews. You see, even before Jesus came, a Gentile could become a Jew.

They'd be circumcised and keep the law. And then they could be a Jew. They could become part of Israel.

What the Judaizers were suggesting is, yes, you Gentiles can be Christians, but you have to become Jews first, because Christ is the King of the Jews. Christ is the Jewish Messiah. Therefore, you must become Jewish, just like any Gentile in any previous generation would become Jewish.

You have to get circumcised, keep the law, and then you can share our Messiah with us, us Jews. And so, the Judaizers were the ones who were trying to impose Jewish law on Christians. The Pharisees were just people who applied Moses' law in a way that is

inappropriate.

Now, I want to talk about both of those, so we'll understand what legalism is. First of all, Pharisaism. We can get a great idea of what was objectionable in Phariseism from the things Jesus said rebuking them, and he rebuked them a lot.

And so, we can make a list of the things that characterized the legalism of the Pharisees. One was hypocrisy. Now, the word hypocrisy means play-acting.

The Greek word, hypokrites, is the word that is translated hypocrite. And it was the ordinary word in the Greek for an actor in a play. Like, you know, we call them a movie star today.

An actor, an actress, they were a hypocrite. Now, that was not considered a bad thing to say about them. That's what they did.

They played a role that was not who they really were. And everybody knew it, and no one despised them for it. The problem is, Jesus turned to people who were not professing to be actors.

People who were professing to be sincere religious people. He said, you're play actors. You're playing a role.

What you are appearing to be is not what you are. You're just reading a script. It's not really who you are inside.

That's what a hypocrite is. And that's what Jesus said they were. And you know, in Matthew 23, in verses 13 and 14 and 15 and 23 and 25 and 27 and 29, Jesus said, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

He said it again and again. Their legalism, one of their chief objectionable features, was their hypocrisy, of course. A second was that they observed a double standard.

And legalistic people almost always do. They have decided that God is going to accept them on the basis of their performance. And therefore, they have to define what the rules are for the performance.

However, they usually give themselves kind of a break in some of the things that are harder for them to keep. They won't give others a break. They'll judge others, but they won't follow the same standard as carefully themselves.

Jesus said that about the Pharisees in Matthew 23, verses 3 and 4. He said, the scribes and Pharisees say, do not. Excuse me. They say, and let me start over again.

The scribes and Pharisees say, and do not do. They say, and they do not do. Let me get this right finally.

For they bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves do not move them with one of their fingers. That is to say, the burden of legalistic requirements. They, in their teaching, put these burdens on people, but they themselves don't carry those burdens.

They themselves don't follow their own teaching completely. A third objectionable thing about the Pharisees was their religious pride and their externalism. They were proud of their obedience, and yet their obedience was almost entirely external.

It didn't correspond with any goodness in their heart, and Jesus pointed that out a number of times. In Matthew 23, verses 5 through 7, he said, but all their works, he's talking about the Pharisees, they do to be seen by men. In other words, it's external, just like Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

When you do your alms, do not be like the hypocrites, because they do their alms in order to be seen by men, and they have their reward. So, in another place here, Matthew 23, verse 5, but all their works they do to be seen by men. They love the best places at the feast, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

They love all that, all the trappings of being religiously respectable. It's all external, though. Another objectionable aspect of Phariseeism is advocating man-made rules or traditions.

That is, making people not only obey God, but obey rules that someone else came up with and said, God cares about these too. The Pharisees were probably, this was their main objectionable feature, because they added to the law continually new rules that God didn't make, and then judged people for not keeping all those traditional rules, and Jesus called them on the carpet for that more than once. In Matthew 15, verse 3, He answered and said to the Pharisees, Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? In verse 9 of Matthew 15, He says, In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

This is a legalistic thing to do. It's not legalistic for me to say, you know, Jesus said, because Jesus said I should teach you to observe everything He commanded. But if I teach you that you must do things that Jesus didn't command, but I impose that upon you, that's legalism.

But to teach you that you should obey Jesus is not legalism. But to teach for doctrines the commandments of men, that is legalism. Also, Phariseeism and the legalism of the Pharisees was, they majored on minors, as is almost always the case.

Because the majors in God's eyes are love, right? Love is the major thing with God. The Pharisees, legalists are hardly ever loving. They major on, you know, whether you dress

right, whether you talk right, whether you do all kinds of things that, you know, they have a standard.

Christians are not supposed to drink, are not supposed to smoke, are not supposed to do something else, little stuff. Stuff that is much smaller than the stuff God really cares most about, and they neglect the weightier matters, as Jesus said. In Matthew 12, 7, Jesus said to the Pharisees, if you had known what this means, and now He quotes Hosea 6, 6, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.

He says you should have learned God's priorities. God prefers that you have mercy rather than that you offer sacrifices. Your religious ceremonies are what you're legalistic about, but you neglect to have mercy, which God actually prefers and cares more about.

In Matthew 23, verses 23 and 24, Jesus said, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law. They major on the minors, but they neglect the really heavy stuff, which He says are justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone, blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.

That is, they are careful about small things. They won't take a gnat into their body, because that's an unclean animal. But a camel's an unclean animal, too.

While they're straining the gnat out of their drink, they'll swallow the camel. So they do one unclean thing that's major, while trying to avoid a little unclean thing. Finally, Pharisees, legalists, are judgmental and resentful in their attitude toward other people's liberty.

If you are an obedient Christian and love Jesus, you obey because you love to obey. Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commands. Well, of course you would.

If you love somebody, you want to please them. That's just what love does. And you don't resent other people who don't obey as much.

You might pity them. They must not know what Jesus is like, or else they'd want to obey him, too. But legalists don't like obeying.

They do it because they're afraid not to. They feel like they have to obey because they have a performance orientation. They expect that God will accept them, if at all, on the basis of their performance and their obedience.

And therefore, they do it out of terror. But they don't enjoy it because their heart doesn't love God. And therefore, it chafes with them to have to give up certain sins and certain pleasures and so forth that God may be asking them to give up.

And when they see someone else who isn't giving those things up, that makes them angry. Like the person who finally, after great difficulty, gives up smoking habit. And then they're extremely judgmental of everyone else who still smokes, more than they were before, because they miss it.

They miss it and wish they could do it, but their religion will not allow them to. And therefore, they resent the fact that other people have the audacity to have the liberty to do something that they don't feel they can do.