

Holiness is Loving and Obeying the God's Law

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[0:00] In the short series on holiness, and we asked, what is holiness?! And we answered that holiness is giving our hearts to God, and it's doing what God does.

It's acting like God acts. It's a very general definition. And the good thing about general definitions is they give us a good framework to work within.

They give us some broad ideas to think about. And today, as we end this series, I want to re-ask that question and snap that question of what is holiness into a closer focus, maybe.

And the answer I want to give you today to the question of what is holiness is this. Holiness is loving and obeying God's law.

Holiness is loving and obeying God's law. Now, some Christians are afraid to land on to love God's law.

[1:09] And maybe even some of you are already thinking, it gives you the heebie-jeebies when you think about that. Because so often, the law is so closely attached to the condemnation that we feel, to the inadequacies that we feel, that a lot of Christians find anything and everything in order to stay away from God's law.

They don't love it. And I guess I want you to see that at the heart of holiness, at the heart of biblical holiness, is really loving God's law.

And that's not a bad thing. The law is still relevant. The law is still good. The law is still encouraging. The law is still helpful. If we are in Christ, our relationship to the law has changed.

And that means our attitude toward the law should change as well. So, at the heart of holiness is loving and obeying God's law.

His commands. Holiness finds expression through actual obedience to God's actual commands. So, giving God your heart and acting like God acts is obeying God's law.

[2:26] It's obeying God's law. To give God your heart, to love him, to give God your heart is to obey God's commands. Now, can you think of any verses that would support that idea?

Or am I just totally making this up? Can you guys think of any verses where those two ideas are put together? You don't have to have them exactly, but just maybe something.

Roger? There's something in 1 John about that. He loved me and will be my command. Yeah. 1 John 2.5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him.

So, living in God, God living in you, happens as we obey his commands. So, practical, day-to-day, loving relationship, communion with God, happens as we obey his commands.

1 John 3.24 Those who obey his commands live in him and he in them. Can you think of something that Jesus says in John, in John, in the Gospel of John?

[3:42] Yeah. John 14.21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. So, this idea of giving God your heart, of loving him, is connected to the obedience to God's commands.

So, giving your heart, dedicating yourself to God, living for God, living in God, living in love toward God, is not separate, is not something distinct from obeying God's commands.

Those two things are put together. And, certainly, acting and obeying God's law is what this means. What it means to be holy. In 1 John, we're not going to turn there, but in 1 John, do you remember what John defines sin as?

He says, sin is lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

[4:48] Sin is breaking the law. It's living like there's no law. So, sin is unholiness. Sin is unholiness. That's obvious. So, therefore, obedience is holiness.

Obedience. Holiness is keeping God's law. Holiness is living according to God's law. If sin and holiness are opposites, then lawlessness and obedience are also opposites.

So, what I want you guys to see here is that holiness and obedience to God's law are co-extent, which is a word that means they cover the same ground.

They cover the same ground. They are the same thing under different terms from a different perspective. They're co-extent. What do I mean?

Let me just give you an example. In South Dakota, there is a county called Todd County. So, we live in Marshall County.

[5:53] Well, in South Dakota, there's a county called Todd County. But Todd County is co-extensive with the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. The entire county is the reservation.

So, is it a county or is it the reservation? It's both. It's both. The reservation and the county cover the same land. So, holiness, being holy and obeying God's commands are co-extensive.

They cover the same land. They cover the same area. You can't say, I love God and I don't care about his commands. That would be like being in Todd County but not being on the reservation. It's impossible. To be in one is to be in the other. So, holiness is obedience. Loving obedience to God's commands.

Now, that's our first point. Now, here's our second. Because I am in Christ, my relationship and my attitude toward the law has changed.

[7:08] Now, there's a lot of confusion.

There's a lot of false teaching. Some of it maybe on purpose but a lot of it not on purpose. But there's a lot of confusion on this point.

Many people think that coming to Jesus means that God's law no longer applies to me. It's no longer important. God's law is just to get me to Jesus.

So, as a sinner, God's law comes in and I feel condemned and I see that I can't do anything. That my works are as filthy rags.

And so, in the light of God's law, I see I have no hope. And so, I come to Jesus for salvation. And they say, that's the end of the law. That's all that the law can do.

[8:11] But it doesn't have anything to do with me after I've come to Jesus. That's a very common teaching. I read a review of a particular book.

It's a book about grace. And this reviewer said this. This book does a marvelous job of relieving readers of self-inflicted guilt.

Of following and obeying Christ's commandments. I'm not exactly sure what they mean by that. But it seems to me that the reviewer is saying that this book is great.

Grace is great. It tells me that I don't have to feel bad about my disobedience. Because now, following Christ's commands is not exactly necessary.

It sets me free from that self-inflicted guilt of how I failed. Because grace has set me free from the law. Well, grace has set me free from the law.

[9:17] How do we think about that? I think the best way to say it is yes and no. Yes and no. We are set free from the curse of the law.

We are set free from the law as a covenant. Whereby this is how we are relating to God. Where my justification depends upon the law.

We're set free from the curse of the law. The covenant of works that the law proposes. But we are never, ever set free from obedience to the law.

So we're set free from the curse of the law. But its commands and its demands haven't changed. So our relationship to it has changed.

And listen to what Horatius Bonar said. So long then, as the old relationship continued between us and the law, or in the apostles' words, so long as we were under law, that's Romans 6, so long as we were under law, there was nothing but condemnation and an evil conscience and a fearful looking for judgment.

[10:32] But with the change of our relationship, there came pardon and liberty and gladness. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.

And so we are no longer under law, but under grace. The law, now listen to what he says, the law is the same law, but it has lost its hold of us, its power over us.

Now listen to what he says now. It cannot cease to challenge perfect obedience from every being under heaven. But to us, its threat and terror are gone.

It can still say obey, still says obey, but it cannot now say disobey and perish if we are in Christ.

So the law has lost its condemning power. But it hasn't ceased to challenge us and encourage us and point us and insist on us obeying and obeying the law.

[11:41] It still says obey, but if we are in Christ and cannot now say disobey and you will perish. We are under the dominion of the law that says, cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law, Galatians.

So it no longer has that authority to condemn us if we are in Christ. And that's why Paul says, and now there's no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus.

There's no condemnation. But the law still challenges us to obey. The law is still the same.

And the law is still saying the same thing. It's still that perfect revelation of what God's will is for man. It doesn't change, even though our relationship to it has changed. And freedom from the curse of the law doesn't negate obedience.

Actually, it's a reason to obey God's law. It actually frees us to obey. And now we can look its demands and its requirements straight in the face and strive to obey.

[13:01] And we want to obey them. We want to obey God's law because God has set us free. We're no longer under a curse. And now I obey out of love instead of a legal fear, a legal fear of condemnation.

And so before, when we were under the law, we either obeyed it in legalistic fear or we ignored it. We knew we couldn't keep it and so I can't do anything about it anyway, so I might as well disobey. Or it's better to reduce it, to somehow manage it, to somehow change it. It's better not to think about even. It's better not to worry about. If I really focus on it, I will just feel how much of a failure I am. So I'm not going to think about the law. I'm not going to look at the law. It's interesting. Sinclair Ferguson, in a lecture of his, He said that legalism, the legal fear, legalism, and antinomianism. What's antinomianism? Where you're against the law. Anti-nomus, against the law. Legalism and antinomianism, they come from the same root.

[14:26] They come from the same legal heart. They aren't really opposites of each other so much as opposites of the gospel. And so, before, we couldn't look at the law.

We had to manage it, or avoid it, or escape it, or reduce it. We had to do something, but we couldn't look at the law for what it was. But now, our relationship to the law has changed.

And now the law can't condemn us. And so you can look at the law and accept it for all that it is, to the full extent of what it is, and you can pursue obedience.

If you fall, and you will fall, your fall will not condemn you. You can see it. You can let it go through you. You can let it x-ray your heart. You can face it, and know that it will not destroy you because I am in Christ Jesus.

I am clothed and robed in Jesus Christ's righteousness, and so I can fully embrace the law. And so, it's the difference between learning to ride your bike on the edge of the Grand Canyon, and learning to ride your bike on the soft carpet of your living room.

[15:39] Now you don't have to be afraid that if you face it, you're going to fall. If you try to get up and ride, you're going to plummet to your death.

Now you might skin your knees, and you will fall, but it will not kill you. It will not destroy you because this is what Jesus has done for you if you're in Christ. And so now we can look at those commands that are so hard, and we don't have to ignore it.

We don't have to sidestep it. We don't have to skim over it. We can say, yes, I'm going to fall, and I will fail, and I will struggle, but God will never ever curse me because Jesus Christ took that curse for me.

And so now we can say what Jonathan Edwards resolved to never give up, to never give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.

So what's going to give you that kind of courage, that kind of fight, that kind of persistence, that kind of insistence that I'm going to keep going no matter what it says, or no matter what happens, I'm going to keep going.

[16:56] No matter how unsuccessful I might be, I'm going to keep going. Well, it's the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is, there's no condemnation. I'm no longer under law. I'm under grace. And so grace takes off the chains.

It takes off the fear and says, run, run in the way of God's commands. And so, because we are in Christ Jesus, our relationship to the law has changed, and our attitude toward the law has changed.

Because this union with Jesus Christ not only changes my legal status, it works inside of me. His spirit now lives in me.

And so his attitude toward the law should be, and is now becoming, my attitude toward the law. So to walk by the spirit, to walk in the spirit of Jesus Christ, is to take Christ's attitude toward the law. Again, Horatius Bonar is so helpful. Listen to what he said. Our new relationship to the law is that of Christ himself to it. Now listen to what he says about our relationship to it.

[18:06] This is how it is for us if we are in Christ. It's that of men who have met all its claims, exhausted its penalties, satisfied its demands, magnified and made it honorable.

Why is that our relationship to the law? Because that's what Christ did. For our faith in God's testimony to Christ's obedience has made us one with him.

The relation of the law to him is its relationship to us who believe in him. His feelings toward the law ought to be our feelings.

The law looks on us as it looks on him, and we should look on the law as he looks on it. And does not he say, I delight to do thy will, O God.

Yea, thy law is within my heart. So, if you are in Christ, if you are believing and trusting in his blood and righteousness, his death and resurrection, then you are joined to the one who loves God's law, who came to obey God's law, who honored it, who says, I delight to do your will.

[19:15] I'm joined to him. And his life is in me. His spirit is in me. And the fullness of grace that is in him is available for me.

And so, I will and I can walk in the ways of God's commands and love it because Christ is in me. So, that's the second thing.

Because I am in Christ, my relationship to the law has changed and my attitude toward the law should change. Now, third, faith doesn't hate the law.

Faith embraces the law. Faith embraces the law. Now, let me show you what I mean. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 119. Psalm 119.

We're just going to read this whole psalm. No, we're going to just look at the first eight verses. And in a lot of ways, it's very representative of what you find in the rest of the psalm.

[20:21] So, I would encourage you to skim through and take your time or take your time and read through Psalm 119 and look at what this man's attitude is toward the law.

Now, you guys know it in general, but maybe take some time to look at it specifically. We're just going to do that with the first eight verses. And here's the question that I want you to look at or try to answer as we read these first eight verses.

And it's this. What does faith do? What does faith believe about the law? I want you to see this man's faith at work. It's a living, breathing faith.

He's not some kind of legalist. He doesn't portray himself as having it all together. He's not above the fight. He has his scars. He has his sins.

He has his fears. He has his troubles. He's not above the fray. He's a man who really loves God, who has real sin, real problems.

[21:23] He's living with God in the middle of life. He's a good example for us. He's just like you. He's just like me. But the thing I want you to notice is that God has taught him.

And God wants to teach us something about living with God's law, living with God's word. And so as we read, look for what faith does with the law.

What does the believer do with the law? How does he live with it? So verses 1 through 8. Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.

Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong. They walk in his ways. You've laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.

Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees. Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

[22:28] I will obey your decrees. Do not utterly forsake me. Now, let's look at the first three verses there.

Or the first two verses, excuse me. First two verses. What does faith believe about God's law in those first two verses? It brings blessing.

It brings joy. Blessed. Happy. Happy are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Happy are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.

Faith believes that keeping the law is the way to happiness. Faith believes that keeping the law is the path to happiness.

The law isn't just about making me feel bad for my sin, but knowing and keeping God's law makes me happy. It brings me into a place of blessing.

[23 : 35] So obeying God's law isn't a burden on the believer's back. It's an open door to joy. It's an open door to joy, to blessing.

That's what this man believes. That's what God is saying to us. Now, sometimes God gives us some really hard commands.

Things that really cut against the flesh. Remember on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, it's better, it's better for a man to gouge out his right eye than to go into hell with two eyes.

If you have a problem with sexual sin, he says it's better to gouge out your eye to cut off your hand rather than sin. Now, what does faith believe about Jesus' commands?

Faith looks at that command to cut off a right hand and gouge out a right eye and says, you know what? It will be better for me. It will be a happier state of affairs if I gouge out my own right eye rather than go into hell.

[24 : 40] So I'm going to do what it takes because I want to be sad and miserable? No, because I want what is best. Faith looks at that and says, you know what? It is really better to do that.

So I'm going to do it. I believe that that is the way to be happy. That is the way to have joy. That is the way to escape hell. So faith believes that obeying God's law in every situation is actually the way that I can find the most blessing in my life.

Now, that's the first thing. What does faith do with God's law? It believes that it's the path to blessing for things that are good for me. Number two, look at verse four.

Look at verse four. What does faith believe about the law there? To be fully obeyed.

The law is to be fully obeyed. You have laid down precepts in there to be fully obeyed. Does faith cancel out the need or the desire to obey?

[25 : 51] Is it Jesus obeyed so I don't have to? Well, the psalmist doesn't argue that way. He's right with God. His sins have been forgiven. He's not under the curse. But he's saying God's laws are to be fully obeyed.

I believe that. That's what faith embraces. And so, now this is something that we need to think about in our own hearts and evaluate our own situations in our own lives. If we somehow take the gospel in any given situation, if you take the gospel and you turn it around and you argue and you argue it this way and that way and it somehow comes out to that God's laws are not to be fully obeyed, you've miscalculated.

You've got it wrong. Faith believes that God's laws are to be fully obeyed. Fully obeyed. Number three.

So, faith believes that God's laws are the way to happiness. Faith believes that God's laws are to be fully obeyed. Now, in verses five and six, what is faith doing? What is faith doing?

You kind of have to read through the lines here to sum it up. But what is faith doing? What is this man doing? verses five and six.

[27 : 13] Yeah, he's confessing his shortcomings. I think there's something emotional here, isn't there? He's grieving his shortcomings.

He's grieving his disobedience. He said, oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees. I want that. But, oh, they're not.

I come short. Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. What is he saying? That sometimes when I look at God's law, that puts me to shame. And he's sad about this.

So, he's looking at his disobedience and he's grieving. He's wishing that he would obey God's law perfectly. And he's ashamed and he's sad over his disobedience.

What does faith do? Faith grieves that I'm not obeying more. It doesn't bury the guilt. It doesn't ignore the law so I don't feel so bad.

[28 : 17] It says, ah, I want to obey. God's laws are to be fully obeyed and here I'm not doing that. So, faith grieves.

Then number four, verse seven. faith believes God's law is the path to praise. Faith believes that God's law is the path to praise.

I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. He's saying, if I could just learn more of your laws, if I could understand them, and he's not talking about head knowledge, he's

talking about heart knowledge that's worked out in a life, as I learn to obey, then I will praise your laws.

As I learn and understand how they apply, I will praise you. God's law wasn't something to hide from, it wasn't something to avoid, he saw it as a pathway to praise.

If I knew God's law, if I kept it, if I was thinking about it, and understanding how it applies, then I would be praising God more. So, faith embraces the law.

[29 : 31] Now, faith isn't leaning on our obedience, of course not, but faith still, nevertheless, embraces the law and loves the law and wants to keep the law. In repentance, what do we do?

We take God's side, we take the law's side, we condemn ourselves in repentance, and we never stop doing that.

Faith wants to keep the law, the new heart that believes in Jesus, also wants to obey. Not because obedience is going to save me, but because obedience is right, because God is worthy.

And so, living by faith isn't ignoring God's law, it has a very positive view of what God has commanded me. Well, so faith embraces the law.

Now, as we end, let's talk about motivation. faith looks at the Bible and it finds all kinds of motivations to obey.

[30 : 34] I think one of our greatest difficulties in keeping the law and being excited about the law, our struggle with the law, is so often, so often, we reduce the motivations down to we just do it just because.

or we think all God says is, you just do it because I said so. And of course, is there some degree of truth to that?

Yes. But the Bible is not nearly so. That's all there is. And faith doesn't find just that reason. Faith looks throughout the Bible and finds all kinds of reasons and promises to careful obedience. to holiness and life by obeying God's commands. The Bible doesn't just say just because. It gives us all kinds of reasons. So, let's go through some of these.

And these are just representative. Why should we keep God's law? Well, it's our duty. And that might sound, duty is a bad word nowadays, but duty is just giving God as due.

[31 : 48] God is who God is, and I am who I am, and what I owe him is what I owe him because who he is, and obedience is what I owe him. That's not just because, that's, God is a great God and I'm his creature.

He deserves to be obeyed. That's my duty. And so, Ecclesiastes, the end of the matter, all has been heard, fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Or this is the whole of man. This is what it means to be a man. You fear God, you keep his commandments, that's what it means to be a man living with God. So, obedience is God's due. But the Bible goes way beyond that. Paul says, it's right. It's the right thing to do. Can you think of a verse where he uses that? Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Parents, can you give that verse? Honey, you need to obey because this is the right thing to do. You're either doing wrong or you're doing right.

[32 : 55] He's saying, do right. This is the right thing to do. It's for our good. Be careful to obey all these words that I command you so that it will go well with you and with your children.

Obedience is not just because. God didn't come to the Old Testament Israel and say, yeah, you just obey me because I said so. He says, do you want good? Do you want to experience blessing in your life?

Then obey. Obedience is the pathway to blessing. We've already looked at that. The Bible says, hey, this is the way to happiness. This is the way to blessing. Obeying is how we follow God's example.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. So he says, forgive others. Why?

Because that's what God did in Christ for you. We obey because our obedience is acting like God. It's imitating God. Obedience gives us assurance.

[34 : 02] Peter writes, therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never fail and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now that's a reason to obey. I want to be confident as I go to die and enter into glory. I want to have confidence that I'm going to have a rich welcome on the other side.

Do you want a rich welcome? Do you want confidence? Do you want a certain hope? Then Peter says, if you do these things, that's what will happen. Obedience gives us confidence and assurance that I'm going to heaven and it's going to be good for me when I get there and I see Jesus and he's going to say, well done, good and faithful servant.

It's good for our society. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. That's a reason to obey. It's good for the people that you live with.

It's good for a nation. Jesus is returning. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed.

[35 : 19] It's coming. Christ is coming and there is only one kind of life that fits with that coming day and it's a life of obedience. How about the good example of others?

Why should you obey? Because your leaders did. Pastor Bob did. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Just be very blunt. Did Pastor Bob care about obedience? The author of Hebrews says, well, you should too.

God's words, not mine. We should obey because we are thankful for God's salvation. God doesn't just say, obey because I said so.

He says, I've saved you. I've had so much mercy on you. So worship me. I've loved you, so obey me. We obey because God is glorified in our obedience.

[36 : 37] Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you've received from God. You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

Why not sin sexually? Because that wouldn't honor God and my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. So I'm going to honor God by my obedience.

I'm going to honor the Spirit who is if you obey my commands you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

I've told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Why should you obey? Because Jesus says it's for your own joy.

Do you want to have joy in God's love for you? Do you want to remain under his smile? Remain in his love and the experience of it then obey. Well that's just that's just scratching the surface.

[37 : 49] The Bible isn't just obey because I said so. It gives us hundreds of motivations and all of those motivations are for our good our everlasting joy and some are warnings some are threats some are happy and some are blessings but what I want to say to you is whatever that exhortation comes in whatever the reason to obey comes into you sometimes Jesus says obey so you'll escape hell that's very solemn but whatever form the motivation comes in you need to read God's heart he means to do you good in Christ he is all for your good and so let's let's just sum up what we've heard today holiness is obeying God's law if we take it out of the general and we move it into the particular holiness is a response to what

God has told me to do we are under law so that it can say disobey and perish the curse is no longer on us if we are in Christ but that doesn't mean that we just now not worry about the law that gives us a reason to obey to keep striving to not be afraid to look the law right in the face and admit our failures and cling to Jesus Christ and by Christ's grace keep striving to obey and we have seen that faith embraces the law faith longs to obey it grieves over its disobedience it finds joy in obedience it finds reasons to worship in the law and finally we see that in the Bible the Bible presents all kinds of reasons that faith embraces that faith holds on to to obey faith doesn't find any shortages of reasons to obey in the law so this is where we're going to end our time is out we'll end where we started it's Hebrews 12 make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy without holiness no one will see the

Lord well may God bless you and help us to be holy we are dismissed