

**Subject: [soundofgrace] Gospel Sanctification -A Reply to Greg**

**Date:** April 21, 2007 7:47:27 AM EDT**To:**

[soundofgrace@welovegod.org](mailto:soundofgrace@welovegod.org)

(This is a continuation of the threads "A Piperism" and "Marshall and Stanford").

Thanks Greg,

I'll respond by making some general comments to clarify what I believe to you and others and then interact specifically with your post.

### **General Comments**

**Godliness is always by discipline.** However we approach obedience, it is a discipline. It is a discipline to receive the comforts of the Gospel when our conscience is condemning us. It is a discipline to act from a mindset of acceptance with God to obedience for God rather than acting from obedience to obtain acceptance before God (at any level).

**We have to sweat for Jesus** and this is hard work. Where ever you put that effort it is work. The question is where will you first put your efforts and focus *primarily* and what efforts are *secondary* and are to flow out of, and result from, where your primary effort is exerted. Even when right internal convictions are driving us to obedience it is still gritty work requiring effort.

We should seek personal holiness **through abiding in Christ** and He in us to produce the inner holiness of a joyful and contented heart resulting in natural and unconstrained obedience to His commands.

**True holiness is first and foremost relational.** The secondary behavioral aspects of holiness flow out of your relationship with Jesus Christ.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." John 15:4

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Heb 11:5-6

Therefore, **the manner** of achieving true holiness is, from first to last, **by faith**. A resting, trusting, God-ward, Christ-treasuring, Spirit-fueled faith expressed throughout scripture in terms such as "Christ lives in me . . . I live by faith" (Gal 2:20, Heb 10:38), "walking by faith" (2 Cor 5:7); "faith working by love"(Gal 5:6), "overcoming the world by faith" (1 John 5:4); "quenching the fiery darts . . . by the shield of faith", "walking, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith" Col 2:6,7), "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:13), "being strong in the Lord, and the power of His might" (Eph 6:10).

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). Therefore, to live by faith, is to continually be influenced towards holiness by embracing the gospel promises of His abiding presence, continual abundant love, guaranteed eternal comfort, and everlasting joyous fellowship

with Christ, all given to us freely.

**I have no trouble with simply stating commands.** For example, saying to someone, "The Lord commands us to love our wives and not be harsh with them. Brother, you need to love your wife and must not be harsh with her." In that exhortation I've not commented on motives and haven't brought any assumptions into the equation. How the person obeys, the motives they employ, and the means they employ, is not commented on in that statement

However, if I was preaching on Colossians 3:19, "husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them", I'd be sure to bring in the broader gospel context of Colossians, for example:

-the parallel verse (vs 18) to wives which encourages submission "as is fitting in the Lord", a clear positional statement.

-"the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel" Col 1:5

-"rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." Col 2:7

-"<sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup>For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Col 1:12-14

-"<sup>1</sup>Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ, who is your <sup>[a]</sup> life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." Col 3:1-4.

That last verse is a clear reference to where the mind *is to be set*. And if the mind is set on something then all else flows from that focus.

There are many other Colossian texts. As believers, this side of the cross, the context for each command is always similar. And the broader context by which we receive all commands is always Christ, and his work, embraced by faith.

Our duty is not just obeying individual commands under various circumstances. **Our duty is to radiate perfect Christ-like obedience at all times and under all circumstances.** Our duty is to obey His law which demands every action carries with it thoughts, and feelings, and emotions, and motives, worthy of the Living God as Christ did.

**God's Law comes to us a unit.** The law is a whole. We are now under the Law of Christ and the greatest expression of that Law is Christ himself. If we are not living in perfect obedience with inward heart, mind, soul and strength we are disobedient (which is always at least to a degree).

And this law includes motives associated with the actions.

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" Matt 15:8

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Matt 28:37 **I do exhort external obedience.** When a believer does not feel like doing their duty before God I *do not excuse the performing of the act of obedience* but rather encourage the performance of the *both the external duty while in parallel dealing with the internal problem* through repentance for heard-heartedness, resting in free forgiveness, meditating on the goodness and example of Christ, prayerfully pleading for joy in all things, and seeking satisfaction in Christ freely offered and flowing through to all our service of our God.

### **Specific Reply**

**Greg:** I'm thankful that the Lord has given us many powerful motives in the form of doctrinal truths (indicatives) as reasons why we should obey Him.

**Shane:** Amen!

**Greg:** However, would you agree that the Bible uses an indicative to motivate only some imperatives? But, other imperatives are given with no motives, just sheer duty?

**Shane:** Firstly, imperatives are never given without motive although motive may not be discussed in the immediate context.

The context of every command comes to us in the context of Christ's finished work on the cross. Every command is given in a context. The context of every word, or command, occurs in the context of the sentence it is placed. Each sentence is given in the context of each paragraph; each paragraph in the context of the chapter and the chapter within the book it is placed in. Each book has a unique place within the entire historical redemptive program of God climaxing in the person and work of Christ on the cross.

Commands are sometimes given without discussion of motives. Where such qualifications are not given we should not make assumptions about the acceptability of simple performance of the command without the appropriate accompanying motives or mindset.

The author of Hebrews considers that the history of the Old Testament, including its commands, ought to leave us "looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith . . ." (Heb 12:2 – see also the context of Heb 10 & 11 and earlier. In particular Heb 10:1, 9, 12, 16-19; Heb11:8, 10, 13, 16, 32, 39-40.)

Paul determined "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). And Jesus, "beginning with Moses and *all the Prophets* he interpreted to them in all the Scripture" (Luke 24:13-27) while speaking of the events of his life, death and resurrection (as per the context).

The centrality of the Christ and His Gospel is the great truth and wellspring from which all other realities in the Christian life are derived including our obedience.

Secondly, let's examine Scripture to see if there is a place for exclusively obeying out of "a motive of sheer duty":

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all (actions) to the glory of God (motive).**" 1 Cor 1:31

1 Cor 10:31 indicates there is no action in our lives that is not to flow from the motive of glorifying God ( i.e. no action is to be performed merely from a motive of "sheer duty" alone.)

"46 They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. **47 Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart**, because of the abundance of all things, 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything." Deut 28:46

Can "no motive" and "sheer duty" be consistent with serving "**the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart**"?

"3 **If I give away all I have (a loving action)**, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, **but have not love (encompasses motive)**, I gain nothing." 1 Cor 13:3

Love, in this context, encompasses motive also, and not merely action. If love in this context is referring to the action of being loving then the person, giving away all they have and delivering up their body, would be a loving person by definition. Notice here that nothing is gained by the action if it is not motivated by love or at least accompanied by a loving attitude. Notice, it is not just the absence of a sinful attitude that is to accompany the giving actions, but also the positive presence of healthy motive.

And what is the font from which love flows according to Scripture?

"5 The aim of our charge is **love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.**" 1 Tim 1:5

**Greg:** Do you believe it's OK to obey God out of duty, with no conscious motive? (No, that's not "Phariseeism" or "legalism." Christ rebuked the Pharisees for obeying from sinful motives, not NO motives.)

**Shane:** Consistent right motives and thinking is also a disciplined habit. I don't see that having most of our obedience from 'no motives' as an option. Whether it is ok for most of our obedience to be from right motives and some to come without conscious motives is probably overworking the details.

As regards actions established by discipline and habit in which there are 'no motives'-Firstly, I question whether 'no motives' is ever a reality. But allowing for it, for the sake of argument, it still would come back to why the habits were formed in the first place which brings motives back into play. And these motives must be informed by the overarching context of the Gospel and who we are in Christ.

**Greg:** Can I suggest that much if not most of our obedience is without conscious motives?

**Shane:** Sure, you can suggest it. Keep in mind:

*"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil*

*treasure produces evil . . .* " **Luke 6:45**

And, ". . . whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Romans 14:23 Having said that, I think it can be unhelpful to overly compartmentalize the commands and our motives, and seek to analyze or manufacture a right motive for every single life action. And perhaps this is what you're getting at. Personally, I don't think it is helpful to get hung up on finding a motive for each action.

Rather, obedience to our one Lord, and his single law, flows from the one place: our heart. All our actions flow from our heart inclinations and our duty is to maintain a right heart-felt focus on Christ.

**Greg:** Every day we obey our Lord from disciplined habits of godliness. And, you know what? That's not a sin.

**Shane:** No one says it is a sin. But those disciplined habits must include right motives when performed and not just the absence of wrong motives. This is also a discipline.

**Greg:** Sure, I prefer to stop and think about why I should obey. But, we often don't have time to think.

**Shane:** Thought is a prerequisite to all voluntary actions whether we stop or not.

If we are seeking to live lives that are flowing from a mind set on Christ we don't need to stop and analyze each action. In fact, a big part of what I'm saying is that it is unhelpful to look too much at our lives and our actions. We're better off being caught up in Christ, His life, His actions, His inheritance to be shared with us, and thus setting our mind on things above.

**Greg:** And, God accepts our obedience in Christ, whether from conscious motives or no motives

**Shane:** I absolutely agree and would even take it one step further. God accepts our obedience *in Christ* even when we act from motives tainted by sin. That's the joy and rest we have in Christ (provided we are in Christ of course). We can wake each morning, as a child of the Living God, and know there is nothing we can do this day that will make us any more loved and accepted by God, or any less loved and accepted by God. We're in Christ! And if we live in the reality of this joy our sanctification will flow.

## **Closing**

Pastorally, here's a key area where these matters become important: When a believer has sinned away all their spiritual strength, and is sorry, sad, despairing and demotivated; how are you going to counsel them?

a) "Do your duty, it's God's command. We have church on Sunday, a prayer meeting on Wednesday, and an outreach on Friday. You've let yourself and God down in all these areas so you really should be there." Or,

b) "Receive afresh the comforts of the Gospel. You're in Christ – that won't change. Pour out your sorrow before God and take your sick heart to the great physician, Jesus Christ, who is the only one that can bring any help and healing to your struggles. Return to Christ, seek him, rest in his grace. And once refreshed you'll find a fresh wellspring of love for Him which will overflow in unconstrained and joyous obedience." (And you

might at this point add, if you must, "And I think it would help if you came to church on Sunday, and . . ."). The main thing I'm concerned for pastorally, in this area, is that our people know that our Lord comes to us at all times with **both** a **Sceptre** in one hand **and** a **Pardon** in the other. If we ever focus on one of these truths to the neglect of the other we fall into either antinomianism or legalism.

Additionally, there is a logical priority to consider. It is firstly taking a good look at terms of the *Pardon* that secondly enables us to rejoice in, and honor, the Sceptre. Otherwise, the Sceptre brings a sense of fear and condemnation to the believer whose eyes have been opened to their sin.

I hope that clarifies where I am coming from. There is a good chance we've misunderstood each other. Prior to your post my discussion was primarily concerned with *means* not so much *motives*. Confusion may have come in by blurring the distinction.

I'm sure I could also be clearer. Did I mention that I know a good book on the subject?

Shane.

Hi Shane,

I'm thankful that the Lord has given us many powerful motives in the form of doctrinal truths (indicatives) as reasons why we should obey Him.

However, would you agree that the Bible uses an indicative to motivate only some imperatives? But, other imperatives are given with no motives, just sheer duty?

Do you believe it's OK to obey God out of duty, with no conscious motive? (No, that's not "Phariseeism" or "legalism." Christ rebuked the Pharisees for obeying from sinful motives, not NO motives.)

Can I suggest that much if not most of our obedience is without conscious motives? Every day we obey our Lord from disciplined habits of godliness. And, you know what? That's not a sin.

Sure, I prefer to stop and think about why I should obey. But, we often don't have time to think. And, God accepts our obedience in Christ, whether from conscious motives or no motives.

Greg Gibson  
[www.JesusSaidFollowMe.org](http://www.JesusSaidFollowMe.org)