

Hanging Out With Jesus: How You Can Obey Jesus Without Becoming a Legalist

Unedited Transcript

John 14:15-24

Good morning, men! Welcome to Man in the Mirror's Men's Bible Study, where we always have room for one more! Let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning, and it's going to go to some guys from Fresh Start Church of Boon, MI. They are led by Dennis Johnson, and this is a group of 4 guys who are meeting Tuesdays at 5:30pm. They've been meeting for 3 years using the Video Bible Study. So I wonder if you would join me in giving these guys a big round of applause? One, two, three, hoorah! We're glad to have you guys with us, welcome! And thanks Dennis for your leadership.

Hanging Out With Jesus is the series we're in. The title of the message, How You Can Obey Jesus Without Becoming a Legalist. You either know a man or are the man who has been involved growing up in a home or church that was legalistic, it put its emphasis on your performance, on your outward behavior and on external things. Who maybe even tried to manipulate or control your behavior, according to some set of manmade rules and regulations. Things that are not necessarily biblical, although they may be ways that you would want to live because of the Bible, though actually not in it. So how can you obey Jesus without becoming a legalist? The problem if you are that man or know that man is that often, after many years of living that way, you just get tired of it, you get worn down, you get exhausted trying to please other people, trying to make other people happy, even trying to make God happy for that matter! Or maybe just avoid his wrath. And you get burned out! That man or you walk away from God and you end up going through a wilderness experience. You may even go to the other extreme; from legalistic behavior all the way to licentious behavior and get involved with wild living. When that happens, what a tragedy! It can be years, even decades before that man gets reoriented to the love, grace, and mercy of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. So the purpose of this message is to show you today how you can obey Jesus without becoming a legalist. What I want to do is I want to give you the skeleton key to help you walk through this journey and unlock the doors that need to be unlocked, but not get caught up in the doors of legalism, licentiousness, self-sufficiency, being independent from God, so forth and so on.

Let's take a look at the text today, John 14. We'll begin at verse 15. There are kind of two Big Ideas in this text. We're only going to look at one of them this week, and we'll look at the Holy Spirit the next time we're together. This week we are going to look at obedience. John 14 starting at verse 15:

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹⁵"If you love me, that is enough..."

You know, it's interesting. When Brazil played in the semi-finals of the World Cup and had that historic 7-1 defeat at the hands of Germany... How many of you, by the way, saw that match? A lot of you! Well, what happened in that match? What happened is that, according to many commentators, Brazil had prepared to have a victory based on how emotional they were, how much they wanted it. In other

words, Brazil had decided that they really really really wanted to win, and that would be enough. Then, early in the game, they were staggered by a couple of early goals, and they fell apart, because, as one commentator said, they did not have the organization and structure to fall back on. If you love me, that is enough. It is enough for your salvation, if you respond to the love of Christ and put your faith in him. But that's not at all what this text is talking about, so let's go ahead and dive a little further into it:

¹⁵"If you love me, keep my commands.

We live in a culture where people don't like other people telling them what to do. We live in a culture where people like to do what seems right in our own eyes, so there's an automatic allergic reaction among most people in our culture to this idea that there's something that we have to do. If you love me, keep my commands. I'm going to skip over the passage a bit, drop to verse 21. Jesus repeats:

²¹Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

²³Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

There are three parts to this, there's loving Jesus, there's obeying Jesus, and then what it is we are obeying, his commands and teachings. Let's take a look at this.

5 Ways To Get Obedience Wrong And 1 Way To Get It Right

I'm going to give you five ways to get obedience wrong and one way to get it right. There are two kinds of commands and teachings. There are the commands and teachings of Jesus, the commands and teachings of the logos, the commands and teachings of God. Then, there are human commands and teachings. Keep your finger in John 14, but turn to Colossians 2. We're going to look at Colossians 2, we could also park in Matthew 23, where Jesus is pronouncing the woes to the scribes and the Pharisees who heap rules and regulations on you, loading you down like pack animals but without lifting a finger to help you, and so forth. In Colossians 2, although we won't take the time to read the whole passage, I would tell you that a good place for you to start would be verse 16. It says:

Freedom From Human Rules

¹⁶Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival...

¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels (a problem back then) disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions...

²⁰Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world (human teachings and commands, as opposed to Christ's), why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? ²²These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

So there are two kinds of commands and teachings, Christ's and human. Reading on, I love this:

²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

So you have human commands and teachings, often taught by religious people, and then you have Christ's commands and teachings, which are located in the word. The word teachings is logos.

The second thing I would like you to see is that there are three motivations to obey these commands and teachings, whether you're trying to obey Jesus or humans. There are three motifs. The first motivation is to earn the approval of men. By the way, we're not even talking about disobedience this morning, that's another topic. We're talking about it solely for the people who want to obey today. So the approval of men, like the Pharisees, so that you can be greeted in the public market place and get that respect. You can have people adore and look up to you. I would like that! If you would approve of me, I would really appreciate that, I would love that! But it's not the right motif for obeying Jesus.

The second motif is to win the approval of God. It's to understand obedience as a performance that I must do. I've made three huge theological errors in my life. The first one was that money will solve my problems and success will make me happy; that made me into a materialist. I became a Christian after that, and then my second theological error was that I could have the best of both worlds. In other words, I could have everything that Christ offered and everything that the world offered and somehow I could synchronize those, mesh them together and come up with my own new fifth gospel, Pat Morley religion. That didn't work out so well, and God humbled me and basically crushed me. He brought me back to himself and I was so shattered and so ashamed that I developed a third theological error, and that third error was that I need to deserve grace. I know I'm saved by faith, but now I need to prove that God hasn't made a mistake! I know I'm saved by faith, but now I need to prove it, I need to deserve this!

The third motif is a response to the grace of Jesus. So if you make a matrix of these two types of commands and teachings and three motifs, you'll see there are six ways to try to live an obedient life. You can try to live an obedient life by following Christ's teachings, but to win the approval of people. You're going to be a good Christian boy so that the people in your church, the guys at your table, or whoever won't think badly of you. Or you could be motivated to win the approval of men by obeying their teachings, and of course this how we get all different kinds of cultish behaviors. This is how a young teenage boy is able to manipulate a young teenage girl, you see? A third way to get obedience wrong is trying to win the approval of God, even by obeying Christ's teachings and commands, thinking if I can just be good enough, if I can just perform, then somehow I can make God happy or avoid his wrath. That I will win his approval, earn his favor, that I will earn merit and make God happy with what I'm doing. A fourth way that is wrong is to win the approval of God by obeying manmade rules and regulations. We looked at Colossians 2 which hits that in a big way. I know when I was trying to deserve grace, to win the approval of God through performance, I remember the day that it all came together for me. I'd been in the middle of a business crisis of my own making, I'd been trying to deserve grace, I had been punctilious, I had been so particular in doing all the spiritual disciplines; in keeping track of how much I read the Bible, and I had a written prayer log and faithful church attendance. All good things, but I wasn't doing them as a response to God, I was doing them to earn favor with God. So my business is in the tank, it's been going on for months and months, and I sit down one day and I write a letter to God and say God, I just can't do this anymore! I need your help! God, you know me! You know how I've been trying to live my life! You know I'm trying to be a man of integrity! You know I'm trying to spend quality

time with my kids! You know how I'm trying to be a Godly husband. You know how I'm being a faithful steward with money you entrusted me with. You know the spiritual disciplines that I do! You know how many little old ladies I've helped across the street! You know all these things! I just need some help! And just like we're talking here, God said to me, Pat, nothing you do will ever make you good enough for me to love you. I love you because I made you. I had been a Christian for fourteen years, and that was the first time that I ever understood grace.

Nothing you or I do, no amount of obedience will ever be enough to make God love us! He loves us because he made us and Christ died for our sins. I'm still on the first circle and my time's almost up! So we've got trying to win the approval of men by following Christ's commands. We've got trying to win the approval of men by obeying manmade rules and regulations. We have trying to win the approval of God by obeying God's commands and teachings, and we have trying to win the approval of God by obeying human teachings and commands. Then, we have obedience as a response to God, but trying to keep these manmade regulations. In other words, we really do sense that God loves us, but now we turn around and we try to obey all the manmade rules and regulations. There are lots of good policies and procedures and different denominations that are manmade! If you love God, you will be at church on Wednesday night! If you love God! I love God, my motif is to respond to grace, I'll be there! I need somebody who really loves God to serve on this committee; you need to go on this mission trip; you need to... Those are three words that turn me inside out. Let me tell you what you need to do! I hate those three words! They just turn me inside out! Every time someone says let me tell you what you need to do, I cringe! Manmade commands and teachings!

The one way, *the one way*, to get obedience right is to obey Christ's commands and Christ's teachings as a response to understanding the ineffable, incomprehensible, unexplainable, uncontainable mercy and grace of God that saved me for all eternity to be with Jesus for the rest of my life. Attested to by the Holy Spirit in me, which the rest of this passage talks about and we'll talk about more next time we're together. Attested to by the Holy Spirit! Right now the Holy Spirit should be speaking to your heart, attesting to the truth of this, that this is his Gospel. It's not winning approval of men, or the approval of God, it's a response to the approval we already have. Not to obey human teachings and commands, but Christ's commands and teachings.

Once you really understand the many ways to get obedience wrong, and the one way to get it right, then we can say with a great deal of passion, the Big Idea, which is this: **Obedience is the trademark of a biblical Christian.** All these other ideas, those five ways to get it wrong, those are the ideas of cultural Christianity, or non-Christianity. Biblical Christianity says we obey the commands and teachings of Jesus because we want to respond in gratitude for the grace that we have. Not to win the approval of God, but because God approves of us. This is grace, this is the good news, this is the Gospel!

What Commands? What Teaching?

How much of the Bible is Christ's teachings and commands? All of it. There 34,450 red letter words of Jesus. Those are precious to us, but he is the logos, all of the word, the whole counsel of God. It's going to take you eighteen life times to figure out what that all is, but that's okay. What you want to obey is what you know; you already know everything you need to know to walk with Jesus. You really do! That's why it's a good idea to have a few brothers around to help you do that.

So what commands? What teaching? The first and greatest commandment, love God. Second commandment, or the new commandment, love one another. Augustine said love God and do what you

want, and what he meant was if you're really loving God the way that God wants to be loved, then everything that you do will be out of the overflow of that love. Galatians 4:15 says love one another, that's the only command that you need.

What commands and what teaching? Go and make disciples, calling men to live Christ, to follow Jesus, to live in him and abide in him. Equipping men to live like Christ, sending men to live for Christ. As I say, we'll get to the Holy Spirit next week, but the Holy Spirit is a deep and profound mystery. These commands of Jesus, he is the one in the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to actually live out this life. It's not in our own strength. Obedience is the trademark of a biblical Christian.

Living It Out

Finally, living it out. How do you do that? How should we then live our lives? You don't have to perform to make God happy. You don't have to perform for God to love you, he already loves you. But because he does love you, you're going to love him. We love because he first loved us. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and gave his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We love him because he first loved us, and because he loves us we're going to love him. And because we love him, we're going to want to respond, and the way we do this is in obedience. The best way to do this in every aspect of your life along the way. To walk out the fact that you're a much loved son.

For example, yesterday I was at the gym. Sharp, young guy, 26 years old. I struck up a conversation with him while he was near some equipment I was using. This is obedience, to make disciples, evangelism is helping people go as far as they are willing to go towards Jesus on a particular day. I said you're working pretty hard today aren't you? He said yeah I guess I am. My name's Pat, and he told me his name. I said I don't remember seeing you around before. He said I've been around for a long time, but actually this is my last day. I'm moving to Colorado tomorrow. I'm thinking God, you are so good to me, and so good to him. You are so gracious! I've been at this gym for years and I've never seen this guy, then I happen to see him his last day! Seeing that as a divine appointment, and wanting to be obedient to the teachings of Christ as a response to what he has done in my life, I said to him are you a spiritual guy? He said not really. I said I write books to help men find meaning and purpose in life, and I would love to give you a copy of one of those books if you're interested. He said that would be great! I said whichever one of us is done first, come get the other one and we'll walk out to my car and I'll give you a copy of this book, *The Man in the Mirror*. We did that, we shook hands and said good bye. I have no idea what will happen, and I'm sure in this world I will never know. I don't even know his last name and he's moving to Colorado, but that is obedience. You're going to have your own situations today where you're going to choose to love God or not, to love one another or not, to make disciples or not, and if you disobey, you don't get the boot. There's no maybe! Maybe for you bad attitude guy! No! There's no boot! The Big Idea today, **Obedience is the trademark of a biblical Christian**. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for this text and this precious word you have given us. Lord, there is a lot of confusion about why we should obey and what obedience means. I pray, Father, that your Spirit would superintend your word to each of us today in the ways that we need to hear it and for anyone who ever hears it. Father, we do want to pledge ourselves because of the grace that we have in our lives to be obedient to your teachings and commands. Not grudgingly, or under compulsion, but because of the gratitude we feel for the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. In his name, we now pray, amen!