

GROW 201 – What We Teach

Lesson 7

RG² and the NT COMMANDS

KEY VERSES:

²⁸“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

¹“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:1-3).

THE BIG PICTURE - THE Story:

It is important to remember how the energy from the first strike in Newton’s Cradle carries over into the next object. The movement from the second ball comes from the movement of the first ball. **If one were to remove the gospel, then the commands of the New Testament are empty and nothing** more than Sisyphus’ boulder. “In Greek mythology Sisyphus was the king of Corinth. He was punished for his self-aggrandizing craftiness and deceitfulness by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, repeating this action for eternity. Through the classical influence on modern culture, tasks that are both laborious and futile are therefore described as Sisyphean.”¹

BASIC IDEAS:

1. The Bible reveals God’s person and work for, in, and through His people.
2. The NT Commands are descriptive of the Christ Life lived in and through our earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4).
3. IN ADAM, we are boundary breakers; IN CHRIST, we are commandment keepers.
4. The Holy Spirit lives out the NT Commands in and through His people.
5. Those commands are not burdensome, but easy and light.
6. No Christian will ever be fruitless. God will always complete what He began.



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Within the *Story* there are numerous commands describing what the people of God look like. A significant issue is how to view the commands and what role they play in the life of the individual. This lesson considers those two ideas. If the Christian life is anything other than what is described in Matthew 11:28-30, then something is wrong.

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER:

Prior to our salvation “experience,” an impossible burden to bear weighed us down. There was nothing we could possibly do to undo what was done. Our **in Adam** condition damned us forever. God, however, stepped in and through His gracious act sent His Son to be our Savior. In grace, He saved His people from their sin. **Unfortunately, many immediately are placed under another burden, the burden of a performance-driven acceptance.** In this case, all salvation functionally becomes is a transferring of burdens. Once we worked for our justification, now we end up working for our sanctification. Both are wrong and both are bondage forming. This study seeks to free once more the freed. **It is to Christ and His work that we are called and invited to partake.**

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON:

In light of what we considered in our previous study concerning “The Christian Life,” (Cf. Lesson 5) it is necessary to continue putting the various pieces together. This present study is a vital part of “connecting the dots.”

New Testament Commands are of great concern for all New Testament believers. The Old Testament said, “Do this, and live.” Yet we must ask ourselves the question as to whether or not this is still true for us.

TODAY’S LESSON:

I. The Problem

Many people who are sincerely seeking to please the Lord find themselves in a mental dilemma and spiritual depression when it comes to the commands of the New Testament. Those who are honest with themselves find themselves completely unable to measure up to the New Testament ideal. Their obedience falls far short of the mark and thus they will develop one of three reactions to the New Testament command.

- **First**, they will try to keep the command, note their terrible failure, and live with despair and defeat.
- **Second**, they will simply give up, and like the proverbial ostrich, live with their head in the sand and simply deny the command.
- **Finally**, there is the group that has convinced themselves that they are keeping the commands and live in pharisaical self-deception.

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What is one to do?

II. What are the New Testament Commands Anyway?

Let us consider five statements that help to answer this question.

First, commands are describing what Christ is like. Much like the entire Bible, they reveal to us who God is and who we are. They reveal Him. As such, we are not to see the command as a standard to be obtained, but rather as a reflection of Him. And they are a reflection of who we will become at His coming. We must remember that commands are not the gospel; Jesus is.

Second, commands are describing **something we work from**, not **something we are to work for**. The admonition to be holy is because I am holy. We do not work to be holy; we work because we are holy. Please note the following passages.

“Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, **just as you are in fact unleavened**. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

“Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (**just as you actually do walk**), that you excel still more” (1 Thess. 4:1).

“If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for **the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are**” (1 Cor. 3:17).

“By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; **because as He is, so also are we in this world**” (1 John 4:17)

Third, commands are a different way of saying, “Keep, obey, fruit, and good works.” If such a grouping is not valid, then each one of the above describes a distinct act. This idea will be explored further in Lesson 8, “RG² and the Holy Spirit.”

Fourth, adherence to the command does not make us anymore in line with God’s approval. Our obedience does not make us more “bless-able.” Our obedience does not put a smile on His face (if such language is permissible).

Unfortunately, we have defined a lifetime of obedience by individual acts. Nonetheless, such a focus is isolating the pieces from the bigger picture. Life is not defined by the individual pieces but by the larger pattern. The “moment” does not define the whole. It can and does have consequences, yet we are defined by Christ.

Because of our past instruction, our minds often think we are always working from a position of deficiency, rather than abundance. We have been conditioned to believe we are defeated and thus are trying to become victorious. Such thinking is unfortunate. We are not defeated in any sense of the word. We are always triumphing in Him (Rom. 8:37). Moreover, **we work from victory, not for victory (Cf. Lesson 12)**.

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Fifth, non-conformity to the command does not make us any more in line with God's judgment. Our disobedience does not make us more "condemned." Our disobedience does not put a frown on His face (again, if such language is permissible).

Whatever divine penalty rested against sin, it was carried out in full at Calvary (Col. 2:13). In a world that rewards hard work and achievement, God's standard of measurement is far different. **There is nothing we can do to measure up to His expectations. God's standard is so high that He had to send His Son to work in our behalf. To think we can do anything to fulfill His expectations is based on a faulty view of our ability and His benchmark. In such thinking, man's ability has been raised and God's benchmark has been lowered. Whether in obedience or in disobedience, our response is to be the same. We are simply to believe that He is enough in this life and in the life to come.**

By way of a summary statement, what can we note?

CONCLUSION:

First, in the pulpit ministry, calling upon people to change their behavior is to place "the cart before the horse." It is of little spiritual value to draw people's attention to the fruit and branch, when it should be placed on the vine (i.e. Christ).

Second, a profession of faith cannot be separated from a practice of faith. The two are inseparably linked. **What one believes does express itself in how one behaves.** "Faith without works is [a] dead [faith]" (James 2:14-26). We believe we do not now have to work to bear fruit. **We will bear fruit**, because the focus is on Him.

Third, every good tree does bear good fruit (Matt. 7:17, 18). Good soil *always* produces fruit (Mark 4:8). It is impossible for it to be otherwise. This does not mean that fruit or obedience will always be expressed in the same way and in the same quantity. We do believe, however, that God is always working in His people. When we are not bearing fruit or are disobedient, we have a tendency to assume that God is not working. Just the opposite is probably true. In these moments of despair, God is working deeply. We base this on 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, and Philippians 1:6.

Fourth, obedience / good works is the natural outworking of one's pursuit of Christ. When we make the statement, "We do not focus on our obedience," We finish it by saying, "We focus on Him." Thus, our attention and energy is on Him, not on our obedience (Heb. 12:1, 2). Christians have a belief-based system, not a behavior-based system. Belief changes behavior. Behavior does not change belief.

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When the focus turns toward ourselves, the old nature takes over and no matter how we dress up the old, it is corrupt and corruptible. Trying to improve the old is a worthless effort. We need to look to Christ who is completing us. It is said, “The only thing we take with us is our character.” The implications of such a statement is crushing. The old “character” is corrupt and unredeemable. The new nature (i.e. character) is incorruptible.

The New Testament commands bring us joy, peace, comfort, and hope, for they point to Christ and describe who we are in Him. Sin has consequences, but **grace abounds!**

BASIC APPLICATION	
1. What did you find helpful from today’s lesson?	7. What is the New Testament Command?
2. What did you find confusing from today’s lesson?	8. How are we to view the New Testament Command?
3. How does this lesson help you in thinking through the gospel?	9. Is the New Testament Command something I am expected to do?
4. How does this lesson help you in how you view yourself?	10. What happens if I do not keep the New Testament Command?
5. What was your “aha” moment?	11. Is it possible for me never to keep the New Testament Command?
6. How might this text challenge you in your daily activity?	12. What role does the New Testament Command play in progressive sanctification [the Christian life]?

May it please the Lord to give us the liberty and rest we crave. May He become everything to us. May we hold the things of this world lightly, and may our grip of Him be firm.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisyphus>

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