

The Standard

By Daryl Wingerd



In Romans 6:17 Paul tells us that Christians are people who have become “obedient from the heart.” No longer is their obedience motivated only by fear of God’s judgment, or fear of disapproval from other people, or fear of living with a tormented conscience. Now they obey because they *want* to. But what do they obey? What “law” are they joyfully keeping? In the same

verse, Paul provides the answer: “But

thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart *to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*”

The word “committed” in this case doesn’t imply a personal commitment —like an athlete who is committed to daily training. The Greek word indicates being “handed over to” or “transferred to” something. Paul is describing the new standard that Christians were “transferred to” when they became followers of Christ. It may help to note that in another place Paul describes himself as being “under the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

What is this new standard? Jesus refers to it when he says “If you love me you will keep *my commandments*” (John 14:15). Near the end of the Sermon on the Mount he refers to the standard as “*these words of mine*” (Matt. 7:24, 26). Furthermore, the authors of the New Testament were representing this standard in their letters to the churches, so you and I should recognize this “standard of teaching” in every commandment and expectation in the New Testament. These letters are “the command of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2). You’ll see it also in Old Testament commands and expectations when they are rightly interpreted through the lens of Christ and the New Testament.

Is there a chapter or book where this “standard of teaching” is given in a concise list of expectations the way the Ten Commandments were given in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5? No, in God’s wisdom he has given us the “law of Christ” in various places and pieces and forms. If you truly are one who has been made “obedient from the heart” to God’s “standard of teaching” here’s what you will want to look for as you read:

Look for positive commands—places where the Bible says, “Do this.” For example, John 13:34 where Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34, also see Rom. 12:9-10; Eph. 4:32-5:2; Col. 3:12-14).

Look for prohibitions—places where the Bible says “Do not do this.” For example, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, also see Matt. 6:19; Rom. 12:19; 2 Cor. 6:14).

Look for descriptions of people who will not be in heaven. For example, “Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10, also see Gal. 5:19-21).

Look for descriptions of people who cannot be permitted to remain in Christian fellowship. For example, “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolator, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one” (1 Cor. 5:11, also see Matt. 18:15-17; Rom. 16:17-19; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Look for descriptions of people who God will cast into hell. For example, “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8, also see Heb. 13:4, 1 Peter 4:3-4).

Look for descriptions of the characteristics of true followers of Jesus. For example, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit . . . those who mourn . . . the meek . . . those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . the merciful . . . the pure in heart . . . the peacemakers . . . those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:2-10, also see Matt. 7:24, 1 Cor. 13).

As you read your Bible, and as you note these kinds of statements, commands, and descriptions, recognize them all for what they really are: “the standard of teaching to which you were committed”—“the law of Christ.” Then, having been set free from slavery to sin, and being obedient from the heart to that standard of teaching, *obey them joyfully!*