

**From Legal Obedience to Gospel Obedience:
The Grace of God that Trains us to Say No to
Ungodliness and Worldly Passions**

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It stretches credulity to think that obedience to God as a necessary activity of the Christian life would be a matter of controversy in Christian circles but sad to report, that in the opinion of many, to urge believers to obey God is a return to Sinai after having been to Zion.

The problem stems from an improper understanding of what it means to be under grace and not under law. Law versus grace has promulgated the following widely held views, with respect to the Christian and the law: (a) It is impossible for us to perfectly obey God's law and with that dictum comes the silent refrain, no need to bother trying, or, God understands your weakness. (b) The Ten Commandments, though they serve some didactic purposes such as showing us our sin and need of a savior, were binding only for Israel under the Mosaic dispensation but not for the Gentile today. (c) We are no longer under the law of Moses but under the law of Christ.

In a word, the guns of legalism are trained on anyone who would dare to assert that the moral law of God is applicable for the Christian.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to answer in depth the error that assumes that the law of God, summarized in the Ten Commandments, is no longer binding for us today. This view is rejected on the basis of the unchangeable character of God, that the will of God is the same for all the members of the Trinity, and the fact that "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work*" (II Timothy 3:16). Let the prophet Jeremiah, as he speaks of the new covenant, put the matter to rest, "*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people*" (Jeremiah 31:33).

We do not wish to minimize or circumvent the matter of justification. Indeed, it is foundational, and therefore, indispensable but it by no means comprises the edifice that is the Christian life. The life in Christ must be adorned with holiness which presupposes obedience to a loving God. Thus, this study is concerned with the matter of obedience for the believer. It derives its inspiration from that portion of the Savoy (XXI.1) which states, "The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in . . . their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind."

We will examine the nature of *legal obedience* by which is meant either of two things: conformity to God's law such that evil is restrained and/or conformity to God's law out of fear of eternal punishment. The former is universal and perhaps could be better termed, *legalistic obedience*. It is limited in its scope as far as pointing one to his need of a savior. Legal obedience, in the latter sense, could and should remain in the recesses of the consciousness of the believer. That said, legal obedience is insufficient grounds for motivating the believer to obey God. The goal is what could be termed, *Gospel obedience*ⁱ, by which is meant that the believer is motivated by the riches of God's grace and the lavish outpouring of His love such that, "*The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*" (Titus 2:11-12).

We would assert, then, that legal obedience is the gateway to, or the causeway back, to a holy God but not the pathway to, the Celestial City. It is Gospel obedience that is to characterize the believer's sanctified life.

Before engaging the issue before us, some preliminary remarks are in order:

As we proceed we will use the word, *fear*, interchangeably with *obedience*, though the former is broader in scope.

God's authority is established for us in the first four words of Scripture, "In the beginning God." That God as the Creator necessarily presupposes his authority and his right to command obedience, seems to be better understood by the unbelieving scientific community than by believers themselves. Any challenge to Darwinian orthodoxy and any scientific research producing information that might, by implication, point to a Creator is met with intense hostility.

God's authority and his right to command obedience is true for all people, for all time. This is traditionally called the first use of the law. We state two other uses at this point: The second use of the law is that it shows us our need for a savior. The third use is that it is the standard for the believer.

After the fall of Adam, God did not lower his standard of holiness nor eliminate the requirement of obedience from his creatures, those made in his image. Whereas it is true that every aspect of man's being has been affected and infected by the fall such that every thought and intent of man's heart was only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5), the requirement of obedience, previously established in Adam's pre-lapsarian state, remained unchanged. How could it be otherwise? Whereas it is true that man, after the fall, lacks the ability to obey God, his depravity does not diminish his responsibility to do so. Louis Berkhof wryly inveighs against the notion that God would not require anything of man of which he was incapable as being a *reductio ad absurdum*. He states, "The deeper he sinks into his slavery [to sin], which robs him of his capacity for good, the less responsible he becomes. If a man continues to sin long enough, he will in the end be absolved from all moral responsibility."ⁱⁱ

Moreover, if Christ is our mediator, then he is for us, prophet, priest and king. Since Christ is king, he must be obeyed. "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"* (Luke 6:46).

The question remains, not what am I able to do but what am I obligated to do? God, by his very nature, commands obedience.

Legalistic Obedience

We use the term "legalistic" obedience to establish the fact that there is in the world the background radiation of God's law wherein there lies in every person, whether they have any knowledge of the Bible or not, the sense of *ought* and *ought not*. Legalism is a self-contained system whereby the proper application of the rules, typically man made, renders a person right with God, so it is thought. There is correspondingly a sense of guilt in every person not necessarily derived from knowledge of the Word of God but nevertheless a real emotion that must be dealt with in one way or another. Wittingly or unwittingly the guilty person asks, what do I have to do in order to assuage my conscience or otherwise get God off my back?

This kind of obedience reaches back very early in human history in Cain's attempt to approach God. He had a need for God as do all of God's image bearers. Like most of humanity he chose to meet his need for God his way. God did not accept his sacrifice and he became angry. In his mind, he had done his duty and, therefore, God owed him. That is the spirit of legalism. There are other examples:

The Pharaoh of Genesis 12 took Abram's wife Sarai, whom he thought was his sister, into his harem. This brought judgment on his household and the only way to stay it was to return

Sarai to her rightful husband. He obeyed God only insofar as it kept him from impending disaster.

The Pharaoh of the Exodus grudgingly, albeit temporarily, obeyed God out of fear of further reprisals from him. *“Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!”* (Exodus 12:32).

When we come to the New Testament we find a certain rich man (a ruler) coming to Jesus with his preconceived notion as to how one is saved. He does not inquire about the purpose or the means of salvation. He simply wants to know if there is anything else that must be done in addition to the commandments that he had already kept. The young man said to him, *“All these [ten commandments] I have kept. What do I still lack?”* (Matthew 19:20). In his thinking, perhaps there is a super commandment that will assuredly convey him across the threshold that is eternal life. Here again we see a performance based obedience that is unwittingly man centered. That this is so is observed in Jesus’ response. *Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me”* (Matthew 19:21). It is not, what must I do? but who is it that I must follow? Eternal life is about following a person as opposed to climbing a ladder of pre-requisite obedience.

The older brother in the story of *The Prodigal Son* amplifies our understanding of legalistic obedience. Though he was a dutiful son, he shared neither his father’s love nor his compassion as indicated by his anger towards his father in what he regarded as rewarding his younger brother’s debauchery with a lavish party. His life was one of dutiful labor which demanded a quid pro quo reward. He had lost nothing in his brother’s leaving nor in his return. As the father had come out to meet his wayward son in reconciliation, so he came out from the festivities to plead with his recalcitrant older son to enter fully into the joy of a reunited family and to urge him to embrace the privileges and blessings of his otherwise advantageous position. The older brother’s anger was directed at both his brother and his father. The legalistic spirit does not love God but only concerns itself in either of two ways: (1) What are the minimum requirements to keep my account open with God? (2) How does my life compare with others around me on the scale of moral acceptability?

Legal Obedience

Legal obedience, as opposed to legalistic obedience, confronts one’s moral guilt before a holy God and acknowledges the justice of being condemned to hell if that were God’s final decision. There is a difference between *legalism* and that which is legal. The former is a man-centered, self-determined, self-contained performance based system. The latter is a binding obligation which must be obeyed or a penalty exacted for disobedience. *“The soul who sins shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:4). *“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”* (Luke 12:5). *“For the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23).

To repeat our earlier assertion, legal obedience is the gateway to, or the causeway back, to a holy God but not the pathway to the Celestial City. When we say it is the gateway, we mean that the converted sinner must pass through, in some manner, at some time, the experience of being confronted with the character of God, his holiness and his righteousness expressed in his law summarized in the Ten Commandments but expanded upon by our Lord. When confronted, the sinner either runs and hides or trembles at the dreaded power and absolute purity and holiness

of God because he understands that where there is sin, the penalty for sin must be paid. It is this admission, unpleasant though it is, that we would call legal obedience or legal fear. This is the prerequisite to Gospel obedience or Gospel fear to be discussed subsequently.

Isaiah's vision is an example. When he saw a vision of the heavenly throne room, he was immediately confronted with his guilt before a holy God. He "*saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up*" (Isaiah 6:1). Along with the activity of the seraphim worshipping and serving before the throne of God, he heard and saw that *the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke* (Isaiah 6:4). His response was a sense of dread and condemnation, *And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"* (Isaiah 6:5).

This was essentially Peter's experience when, after fishing all night, Jesus told him and his colleagues to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. Peter remonstrated, "*Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets*" (Luke 5:5). After hauling in so large a catch that their boats began to sink, Peter responded by falling down at Jesus knees saying, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*" (Luke 5:8). It's not that Peter was merely bested at his trade by a non-fisherman, it was his unbelief together with the very presence of Jesus demonstrating his obvious sovereignty over the situation that brought conviction of sin.

Peter's sermon on Pentecost pierced the hearts of his hearers and, no doubt, terrified them at the thought of being under God's just wrath. They had crucified the long awaited Messiah.

This Jesus [of Nazareth] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. . . . Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:23-24, 36).

No amount of rationalization or blame fixing could avert the just sentence of death against them. Their proper response was legal obedience, "*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"*" (Acts 2:37). Those who received Peter's words repented and were baptized and became part of the church.

Saul of Tarsus felt the weight of God's wrath, as well as his grace, on the road to Damascus when a light flashed around him and he fell to the ground. The voice from heaven spoke, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* (Acts 9:4) In retelling his story to Agrippa, he stated that he was "*not disobedient to the heavenly vision*" (Acts 26:19). Moreover, somewhere in his experience, he came to understand that in his sinful nature, he was truly, actually, morally guilty before God. *I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died* (Romans 7:9).

The causewayⁱⁱⁱ back to God is similar. The believer has turned aside and has fallen into grievous sin. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (XVII.3) states, "Nevertheless, they [believers] may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, . . . fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, . . . and bring temporal judgments upon themselves." In some cases the wayward child of God has drifted so far, his relationship with God has so deteriorated, that all that is left is the legal component by which is meant the curses or temporal judgments of the covenant. Jeremiah spoke to this as the people were wondering why God had dealt so severely with them.

But even in those days [of exile], declares the LORD, I will not make a full end of you. And when your people say, 'Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?' you shall say to

*them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.' . . . Declare this in the house of Jacob; proclaim it in Judah: "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not. **Do you not fear me?** declares the LORD. **Do you not tremble before me?** I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it. But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say in their hearts, "Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest" (Jeremiah 5:18-24).*

The way back to God, the causeway that leads one through the quagmire that has become the cumulative and permanent consequences of sin, is initially, at least, giving heed to the dire warnings that *our God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:29); *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Hebrews 10:31); and *the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God* (I Corinthians 6:9).

God is not indifferent to evil. He is doing something about it continually. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness, suppress the truth* (Romans 1:18). He will punish evil wherever he finds it. He is no respecter of persons. If any household of the oppressed Hebrews did not have the blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts, the firstborn in that household would have been slain just as surely as in the household of the Egyptians.

We would contend that the starting point of saving faith, that faith that pleases God, is legal obedience, more commonly called repentance. Hebrews 11:6, states, *"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."* We take issue with the modern translations and we prefer the King James Version in the phrase, *"for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,"* as being more faithful to the Greek, πιστεῦσαι γὰρ δεῖ τὸν προσερχόμενον τῷ Θεῷ ὅτι ἐστὶ. To believe that God is [ἐστὶ] is much more than an intellectual assent to the existence of a first cause or an unmoved mover. Rather the starting point of faith is to believe in the "is-ness" of God by which is meant to bow before the infinite, eternal, holy and sovereign God who is the creator and sustainer of all things including the next beat of one's heart. Moreover, to believe that God is, is to submit to the God revealed in Scripture as the only true God who eternally subsists in three distinct persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In legal obedience, one understands and accepts the fact of his guilt and cries out to God for salvation.

The remainder of Hebrews 11:6 *"and that he rewards those who seek him,"* provides a glimpse of that which is necessarily the pathway towards our final glorification, the life of sanctification, that of *Gospel obedience*. The gift of salvation that is received by faith yielding justification is both a gift and a reward. The reward is a person first and foremost. Eternal life is knowing God and his Son Jesus Christ (John 17:3). This knowledge is relational, as opposed to merely informational.

This relationship is described as a covenant. A covenant is a particular kind of relationship with a particular structure comprising: promise, obligations, sacramental signs, blessings and curses. This covenant relationship is initiated by God, grounded in his promises, and sealed in the blood of Christ. In other words, it is grace that binds the believer to God. There are also the sacramental signs and seals of our faith: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The internal fabric of this relationship is one of love. *"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations"* (Deuteronomy 7:9; cf. Neh. 9:32;

Ps. 103:17; 106:1, 7, 45). A fuller understanding of this relationship of love is given under the new covenant. “*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*” (Romans 5:5). “*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised*” (11 Corinthians 5:14-15). It is God’s covenant faithfulness and love that stands behind the obligations of the covenant. This is where we locate what we would call Gospel obedience.

Gospel Obedience

We have already noted that obedience is a necessary function of the covenant, the whole of which is circumscribed and maintained by the grace of God. It is not a legal add-on but this obedience proceeds out of love for the One who first loved us.

We turn to the Apostle Paul for further instruction as to how the grace of God operates within us to produce Gospel obedience. “*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions*” (Titus 2:11-12a). How does the grace of God train us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions? Having passed through the gateway of legal obedience, we have been confronted and we have accepted the verdict declared against us. Moreover, as the light of God’s holiness exposed the true condition of our hearts, we also discovered our abject inability to right the ship while at the same time being held responsible for our rebellion against God. That is the point where we cried out to God to save us. Save us from what? ungodliness and worldly passions.

What is ungodliness? It is the exact opposite to that stated in the first part of Hebrews 11:6, referenced previously. There, godliness means orienting oneself in the proper Creator-creature relationship and engaging the awesome majesty of an all-powerful, holy God who rules over all and sustains all things by the word of his power. Ungodliness, by contrast, is rendering God irrelevant to our lives and asserting our independence from him. Worldly passions are those activities that proceed from worldly thinking defined by the Apostle John as *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life* (I John 2:16, KJV).

It is the grace of God, then, that enables the sinner to see the sinfulness of sin together with the dread of falling into the hands of an angry God. It is sin and judgment from which the sinner cries out to God for salvation. Why then would he want to return to that from which he asked to be delivered? It is sad to observe this wantonness in many who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ—nobody’s perfect—so the rationalization goes.

The Apostle adds further. The grace of God teaches us that we are saved **from** a life of sin **to** a life of righteousness. Jesus Christ our Savior “*gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*” (Titus 2:14). To be redeemed is to be bought back through the payment of a price, the price being the blood of Christ. What are we redeemed from? all lawlessness. What are we redeemed to? covenant faithfulness and good works, the obligations of the covenant. The phrase, “*to purify for himself a people for his own possession,*” is covenantal language. Our Lord speaks of his ancient people Israel in this way, “*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth*” (Deuteronomy 7:6). The Apostle Peter describes God’s people in the same way: “*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy*

nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).

It is true that the nature of sin and its implications are not fully understood by the new believer. As one grows in his understanding of the character of God and develops a deeper understanding of the Gospel, the toxic nature of sin and its deleterious effects, become more obvious. It is the grace of God, by means of the work of the Holy Spirit, that is training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. Our Lord commands obedience as a function of the covenant of grace not as a legalistic repayment of a debt. But there is more.

In Gospel obedience love for God must be the motivation for obeying him because that is indeed the life of sanctification. We have noted that in the covenant of grace there are obligations that are a function of the covenant. We hold that every defined human relationship carries with it obligations of some sort. Among the many ways the New Testament illustrates the Gospel is by extending the Old Testament analogies of marriage and adoption. If it can be shown that the internal structure of these relationships is covenantal, then we have reinforced our position that obedience to God, far from being a legalistic appendage inimical to the doctrine of grace, is, in fact, necessary to our life in Christ. Sanctification organically proceeds from justification.

We learn from the prophet Malachi (2:14) that marriage is a covenant relationship. It is also used figuratively as a description of God’s relationship with his people. The prophet Jeremiah referred to the covenant the Lord made with Israel when he took them out of Egypt, “*a covenant that they broke, though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord*” (Jeremiah 31:32). The Lord, through the prophet Hosea, speaks of that day when, “*I will betroth you to me forever, in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and mercy*” (Hosea 2:19). The Apostle Paul deploys the analogy of marriage as a picture of the profound mystery of Christ and his church. The marriage is to function so as to present a picture, before a watching world, of Christ having sanctified and cleansed his people “*so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:26-27). The implication is clear. Obedience in the Christian life proceeds from, and is motivated by, the prior work of God’s grace. The obligations of the marriage covenant, literal or figurative, function within the boundaries of grace.

Adoption is also a relationship of covenant, in the context of this study, the covenant of grace. We were predestined in love, before the foundation of the world “*for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 1:5). “*To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*” (John 1:12). “*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*” (Romans 8:15). Adoption and the covenant of grace are inseparable. The first explicit reference to the covenant of grace is that which God made with Abraham. Therefore, “*those [Jews or Gentiles] who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith*” (Galatians 3:9). Additionally, “*if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise*” (Galatians 3:29).

We reiterate our assertion here. Gospel obedience is a function of the covenant of grace, not a legalistic dilution of “by grace, not works.” It is an obedience that flows out of the privileges of adoption and filial love which is wholly by God’s grace. The Apostle Paul exhorts us to “*be imitators of God, as beloved children*” (Ephesians 5:1). A child who is loved by his father does not wish to wantonly disobey him. A loved child of God feels the effects of sinning against his heavenly Father, which induces Godly sorrow yielding true repentance. A loved

child of God is well aware of God's prerogative to condemn a sinner to hell, which is a bulwark against the sin of presumption. We would call this legal fear. A much more profound fear resides in the child of God, that of Gospel fear. He fears to bring dishonor to the One who gave his Son for him and has graciously given him all things (Romans 8:32). A loved child of God is conscious of the Holy Spirit within (Romans 5:5). *God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* (Galatians 4:3-6). The Holy Spirit is there to convict the offending believer of sin which results in an uncomfortable sense of estrangement from the Father whom he loves. The Holy Spirit also points him to the cross where there is forgiveness and restoration. Rightly considered, to fear God and to obey him, or to fear him and love him, are not incompatible.

Gospel obedience is not confined to the New Testament. Think of Joseph with Potiphar's wife. *How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?* (Genesis 39:9). Moses exhorts the people of Israel before they enter the land: *"You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always"* (Deuteronomy 11:1). Nehemiah, at the beginning of his prayer of confession for the nation Israel, connects God's covenant, his steadfast love (his intervening gracious love), with our love and keeping the commandments: *O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments* (Nehemiah 1:5). Gospel obedience must characterize the true child of God.

There is a subtle tendency for people to want God's mercy so as to escape the fires of hell but not his grace which justifies and sanctifies. To receive God's grace is to have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; it is to be adopted as his sons. Both of these acts of grace place us under obligation to follow Christ with our whole hearts in loving obedience. The commands to be obeyed are summarized for us in the moral law, the Ten Commandments, amplified in the rest of the Old Testament and by our Lord himself. They reflect the character of God. If God is good, then his commands are good and they are good for me. If God has set his love upon us, our response is loving obedience as the normal activity of the sanctified life of the believer.

We conclude by quoting Charles Spurgeon's, Morning and Evening (*Evening, January 25*) who captures the essence of this study in an exposition of Romans 3:31, *"Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."*

When the believer is adopted into the Lord's family, his relationship to old Adam and the law ceases at once; but then he is under a new rule and a new covenant. Believer, you are God's child; it is your first duty to obey your heavenly Father. A servile spirit you have nothing to do with: You are not a slave but a child. And now, inasmuch as you are a beloved child, you are bound to obey your Father's faintest wish, the least intimation of His will. Does He bid you fulfill a sacred ordinance? It is at your peril that you neglect it, for you will be disobeying your Father. Does He command you to seek the image of Jesus? Is it not your joy to do so? Does Jesus tell you, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"? Then not because the law commands, but because your Savior enjoins, you will labor to be perfect in holiness. Does He bid his saints to love one another? Do it, not because the law says, "Love your neighbor," but because Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And this is the commandment that He has given unto you, "that you love one another." Are you told to distribute to the poor? Do it, not because charity is a burden that you dare not shirk, but because Jesus teaches, "Give to him that asks of you." Does the Word say, "Love God with all your heart"? Look at the commandment and reply, "Ah, commandment, Christ has fulfilled you

already, I have no need, therefore, to fulfill you for my salvation, but I rejoice to yield obedience to you because God is my Father now, and He has a claim upon me, which I would not dispute.” May the Holy Ghost make your heart obedient to the constraining power of Christ’s love, that your prayer may be, “I will run the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!” Grace is the mother and nurse of holiness, and not the apologist of sin.

With the oft quoted first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism in mind, let it be said that loving obedience most certainly glorifies God because his commandments are a reflection of his character and it is the sure way for his child to enjoy him forever.

ⁱ The phrase comes from the English Puritans

ⁱⁱ Berkhof, Louis, Systematic Theology, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1939-41, p. 219.

ⁱⁱⁱ I use the term *causeway* to illustrate the fact that the believer, having fallen into sin but subsequently coming to a place of repentance, that person has to navigate his way back to God, depending on the length and depth of his sin, over a field of consequences that remain even after experiencing the grace of forgiveness.