

What Are You Focusing On?

My purpose for last week's message, ["Are The Greatest Commandments Greater Than The 10?"](#), was to emphasize the importance of focusing on loving Jesus rather than following the laws of Moses. Paul makes it very clear that we are not to forget the law, but that our faith in God is infinitely more important than obeying His laws.

Faith comes first, only then will we develop the ability to obey the law through being transformed. The focus though, is to please God out of our love for Him, not to obey the law.

Romans 3: ³¹ Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.

Take the "Rich young ruler" for example...

Mark 10 ¹⁷ As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. ¹⁹ But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰ "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

²¹ Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come,

follow me."

²² At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

I find this passage very interesting. Jesus first of all makes it clear that no one is good (All have sinned **Romans 3:23**). Then after checking off a list of commandments, the man states that he's obeyed them. After that Jesus seems to ask the man to do the one thing he wasn't willing to do. I believe that we can surmise from this that the man's sin was idolatry and it kept him from being obedient.

The disciples were willing to walk away from their soon to be former lives to follow Jesus, but this man was not willing. But Jesus' instructions did not end with "Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor", that was what he would need to do, in order to do what Jesus requires, which is to follow Him.

That being said, I think it is far more difficult to follow Jesus than it is to obey the 10 commandments, but it far more worth it.

Turn from your selfish ways

***Mark 8:** ³⁴ Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.*

I truly believe that's all He really asks of us, which is to "Follow Him". He says this time and time again throughout the gospels as I'm sure you know. We've all read it before:

***Matthew 4:** ¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to*

preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

"Turn to God" = "Follow Jesus"

The rich man was obeying Moses' commandments, but when it came to following the Messiah, forget it. He didn't even realize that his very own "riches" were an obstacle.

Think about this.

Every other religion and belief system is all about "do this", or "do that" to achieve Nirvana or "the next level". Jesus never makes it about what we can or can't do, He wants our hearts and for us to have faith in Him. Just like a daddy wants the hearts of his son or daughter more than for them to just clean their room. This is so fundamental to our faith and sets us apart from everyone who is not following Jesus.

Romans 4: ⁵ But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.

"Follow Me"

What does that mean to you? What do you think about when you read those words? Are you following Him now? And what does that look like?

I think when we follow Him for a period of time He will direct us on a day to day basis and we start to recognize His voice more and more:

John 10: ²⁴ The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't

believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. ²⁶ But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, ²⁹ for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. ³⁰ The Father and I are one."

Are you focusing on Jesus or the law?

When we follow Jesus, we learn how to know Him on a personal level, have a greater peace and learn what true joy really is. This also simplifies our lives. If our prime directive each day is to evaluate each decision based on the two greatest commandments then our decision making is easier.

When I focus on the Ten Commandments (the law) it is always about my ability or inability to live up to them. If I'm doing a good job of following them, then I start to become proud and it's all about me. If I'm not doing a good job of following the law and sinning out of control like a reckless maniac, I'm full of guilt, become angry at myself and others, and again, it becomes about me. Do you see then the focus starts with the law and before I know it the focus is on me and my problem? This is stressful and the Christian life should not be this way.

This also naturally leads to the comparison with others. If I'm following the law, I become inclined to see other's failures to do what I can do. This leads me to be boastful. If I see others obeying laws that I struggle with then I might think "If only I was as good as Joe is..." What a horrible place to be. This is a childish way to live our lives and is an endless game of comparison and trying to live up to some standard that I cannot. This is not restful in the least. I

grew up with this way of judging myself and others based on performance.

Matthew 7: “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. ² For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.

You won't find forgiveness in the law.

The more I follow Jesus, the more my “selfish ways” becomes clear to me. I become very aware of my “issues” and this allows me to have more compassion for others as I know Jesus has so much compassion for me. There is no forgiveness in the law, but Jesus is all about forgiveness, but that does not mean we take advantage of this freedom.

Romans 4: ¹⁴ If God's promise is only for those who obey the law, then faith is not necessary and the promise is pointless. ¹⁵ For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

¹⁶ So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe.

God values relationships more than anything

When I came to the realization that **God cares more about my relationship with Him** than my ability to lead a sin-free life it released a heavy burden and allowed me to accept my weaknesses for what they are. This does not mean I become comfortable with my “problems”, it just means He still has work to do in my life. The closer my relationship with Him becomes, the more sorrow I have over my sinfulness.

1 Thessalonians 5: ²³ Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. ²⁴ God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.

Remember that we are broken and it's His job to fix us, not ours. He is the Healer, we are not. When we continue to follow Him, He will heal us in many ways, on His terms, and in His timing.

My Before and After

Before, when I did not have this relationship, the sin in my life pushed me away from God because I did not know Him well enough, but now that I know Him I know that what He truly wants is my love, which yields thanks and praise. Now when I sin, whether it is deliberate or not, I have a greater desire to repent of it and come crawling back to Him, asking for His forgiveness. Oh, what a joy that is!

Psalms 32: ¹ Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

² Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

³ When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

⁴ Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

⁵ Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord."

And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

1 John 1: ⁸ *If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.* ⁹ *But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.* ¹⁰ *If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.*

Do you see how this personal relationship with Him makes all the difference?

Will you follow Him?

“Dear Lord, if only I knew you more. You are perfect in all your ways and I am so thankful for your wonderful love and everlasting compassion. Thank you for the relationship that we have and for teaching me things I couldn’t have learned elsewhere. You are so good and I desire to be more like you. Please change my heart and help me to live a life that truly pleases you and brings you glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

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