

The Lord Jesus said ... “My Sheep

The New Testament Scriptures are not “just like” the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, much of it is written in personal letter form.

Which would you find easier to follow - a company manual that lists all its policies in detailed, alphabetical order - or - company letters sent to customers over the course of many years, each dealing with only specific problems?

Through the manual obviously one can more easily find what is right and wrong. Letters, on the other hand, require more dedication and devotion. One must sift through, *think*, and rightly divide the material. In the end, letters add a dimension of understanding that manuals never could. The company’s true character, personality and customer relationships are communicated through the letters.

The Christian life is not a military camp with many ranks of authorities, strict detailed rules and harsh punishments— but a love relationship of a family.

The New Testament is often viewed as though it functions just like the Old, even by those who clearly understand the doctrinal differences between law and grace. It is often viewed as though it were a sort of “*New Law*.” The believer, though, is not under law – its letter *nor* its principle of governing behavior. The law gives exact details for life and worship, and when broken demands a penalty to maintain fellowship.

We are Sons, not children

In the Old Testament tabernacle (a beautiful illustration of the New Testament church), Moses recorded a very rigorous set of instructions in the form of “thou shalt’s” and “thou shalt not’s.” These laws included everything from types of materials and colors to how to carry and assemble the tabernacle (Ex. 25-40; L.v. 1-27).

Concerning the New Testament church, there are very few such explicit commandments or statements. And there is a good reason. Under the New Covenant, God views believers, no longer as immature “children,” but as matured “sons” (Gal. 3:24 - 4:7; Eph. 1:5).

hear my voice, and

The scriptural concept of “sonship” is somewhat foreign to modern Western culture. It means more than a simple biological male relationship. It was when a child came of age and received the father’s inheritance. When that age was reached the child was considered a “son.” He now had the full privilege to use and control his inheritance. (See prodigal son, Luke 15).

SONSHIP - when the prescribed time fully arrived the offspring passed:

- from childhood to manhood
- from being told what he could do, to deciding for himself what to do
- from the same status as a servant to the status of the household manager
- from obeying the father because he had to, to fulfilling the father’s desires because he wants to.

Galatians reveals to the NT believer that God’s “fulness of time” has come in His program with His people. Now we have received the “adoption of sons,” and have the “*Spirit of His Son*” in our hearts. And as a “son” the church has left the child and servant stage in God’s dispensational plan and is now an heir of God through Christ. Therefore, we are not under law and its rules (holy days, feasts, rituals (liturgy), etc.) as a way of producing holiness and worship to God (Gal. 4:1-10).

The law was made for the child stage and is called a “paidagogos” in the Greek and is translated “school-master,” (tutor, trainer or the one in charge) (Gal. 3:24,25). Brother Scofield defines a ‘pedagogue’ as follows:

“In the Greek and Roman world the pedagogue was the ... guardian in the ... life of minor children. ... the pedagogue’s authority, ... wholly ceased when the ‘child’ became a son [that is] when the minor became an adult. The adult ‘son’ does voluntarily that which formerly he did in fear of the pedagogue. But even if he does not, it is no longer an issue between the son and the pedagogue ... but between the son and ... his father.”

The role of the law as a pedagogue is clear. And the law has served its purpose well, but its time of authority has now passed. By faith in Christ Jesus, we are “sons”; as sons we are no longer under any obligation,

they follow me” John 10:27

eternal or otherwise, to follow the ‘pedagogue’ which is the law of Moses.

For example, a good father will strictly forbid his young child from sticking his finger into a pot of boiling water. He will also strictly legislate with penalty what he can and can’t touch, eat, wear, etc. But when that child reaches maturity, the father no longer has to govern in that way. Why? For the *adult* now understands the *principles* of the father’s former “laws” and a “son” will *choose* through understanding not to stick his finger into boiling water. The same results are obtained but from different principles. The “child” way involves rote obedience. The “son” way involves the mind and heart.

We as Christians have been brought to the status of “sons” through the Gospel of Christ. We have many principles which the Law of Moses conveyed to us as the pedagogue, but we are no longer under the guidance of that Law. We are no longer under the authority of the pedagogue. We are free.

This is true Christian freedom: the freedom to choose *with understanding* to do the things which please God. Christian freedom is *not* blind obedience to rules, but it is also not a license for men to do things their own way, even when their motives might be above reproach.

There is no more pedagogue, but there is still a Father.

The ordinances of Moses were not the only things abolished (Eph. 2:15) by the introduction of the New Covenant. The very *idea* or *principle* of law itself has been abolished, for the believer is not “under law.” (Without the article “the” before the word “law,” it now means the principle, Rom. 6:14).

In other words, the New Testament is not simply one law that has replaced another. Rather, it is one principle for producing righteous behavior that has replaced another principle for producing righteous behavior. One drives a person out of fear alone, the other not only involves reverent fear, but also love and desire. One expects blind obedience regardless of thought or intellect, the other expects enlightened obedience through understanding and wisdom—but obedience nonetheless.

“God hath sent forth the Spirit

OT PICTURE

King David was in a fierce battle against the enemies of Israel, the Philistines. The Philistines were occupying his city of Bethlehem. David was exhausted and thirsty as he was in a cave. In his weariness he privately sighed his longing for water from the fresh well of Bethlehem.

This was not an order, charge or command, but a desire revealed. Three of David’s mighty men, unbeknown to David, hazarded their lives and slipped through enemy territory to obtain water for their king from the Bethlehem well. David was so moved that he would not drink it. Because of the value of lifeblood the men risked for it, he offered it as an offering unto the Lord as he poured it out (2Sam. 23: 14-17).

The three mighty men did not perform out of ‘obey a command or suffer penalty’ – *law*, but out of heart devotion to satisfy the king’s *desires*. And it touched the king’s heart greatly.

The Lord desires us to *choose* to follow His ways with understanding and devotion, not simply to “check a rule book” and do a duty. To believe we have freedom to do it our way since the rule book doesn’t say *no* is really legalism; it only considers “rules.” He desires us to diligently know His precepts and principles to arrive at doing the pleasures of His heart. Are we close enough to the Lord to hear His desires?

Notice the goal Paul prayed for the Christians. “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding... pleasing ... being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:9,10).

Only with this knowledge and understanding of His will can we as “sons” make the judgments of everyday life that will be our Lord’s desires. As “sons” *now* with the Spirit, it is possible to do this. When our own wisdom is removed, the end result will inevitably be the Lord Jesus Christ glorified and God’s people edified.

As sons of God we want to now consider:

- a. Sonship expressed in God’s local church
- b. How sons practice the will of their Father

of His Son into your hearts, ...

Sonship expressed in God's local church

Not only does the principle of sonship apply to the Christian in his individual life, but it also applies equally well in finding the truth concerning the local assembly. There are commandments for the local assembly (1Cor. 14:37). The old way would say concerning God's commandments: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4). The Lord Jesus says in the new way, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

A common expression to the NT church is, I "beseech" (Rom. 12:1, 15:30, 16:17, 1Cor. 1:10, 4:16, 2Cor. 2:8, 10:1, 2, Eph. 4:1, etc.). "For love's sake I rather beseech thee" (Philemon 1:9). Beseech is more of an entreaty and expected favor based on love than an impersonal rule.

The practices of the local church are a direct reflection on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor 11:26). The government of the local church is a direct reflection on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ over the Church (Matthew 18:16-20, 1Cor. 5:4, Eph. 1:22).

The New Testament local church gives visible expression to the "sonship" of the gospel. It knows nothing of one man doing the majority of the leading and teaching. But it does know of many believers with minds and gifts being able as sons to express themselves in public assembly (1Cor. 14:26-32).

It knows nothing of a church meeting where a man governs the people by telling them what to sing, when to sing, who and when to pray, or who and on what to speak about. But it does know of sons under the Lord's authority who thus have control of their own spirits and are able to be sensitive to the leading of His Spirit, having liberty to speak, pray, and sing (1Cor. 14:15, 30, 32).

It knows nothing of addressing men with titles before their name. But it does know of calling each other brother and sister for that reflects the equality of brotherhood – which is the gospel (Mat. 23:8-12, Gal. 3:26-28).

Wherefore thou art no more a servant,

Example of Sonship Principle in the Church

There is no commandment that says, "Thou shalt have the Lord's Supper once every week." He only said, "as *often* as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." But in seeking the Lord's desire, one will find the Lord left hints for the heart along the way. He records that the first century Christians did meet once a week—and when they assembled they broke bread in remembrance of the Lord Jesus (1Cor. 11: 20,21, 16:2, Acts 20:27).

How often does a husband want to be kissed by his wife? Seldom or *often*? Would he dare demand and declare, "You *must* kiss me 6 times a day"? Though he desires her affection often, he wants it to come from her heart's desire. Will we exercise our "Christian freedom" and break bread in remembrance of *Him* every so many months, or seek from Scriptural insight what our Lord's heart really desires of His beloved bride?

How Sons practice the will of their Father

How then are practices reached that will please the Lord? There are 4 things to consider, revealed in the Scriptures: precept, principle, purpose and preference.

1. Precept
2. Principle
3. Purpose
4. Preference

= a Practice pleasing to God

1. **Precept** The word precept means - "rule or action of conduct that is prescribed by one over you." The Psalmist in chapter 119 mentions God's precepts no less than 21 times. He realizes this key to life as he says, "Through thy *precepts* I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way." God has spoken also in the NT. And as brought out, there are certain moral and spiritual commandments (precepts). These reveal God's direct desires. These should never be ignored or violated in deciding on a practice. They are to be obeyed.

but a Son" Gal. 4:6,7

2. **Principle** A principle is a truth that will govern the action of something. For example, the principle (law) of gravity will determine how you might position yourself on the roof of a house.

In the Scripture not every truth is given by precept. There are many principles (spiritual laws). The principle of the Lord being *glorified* in all things and not man should govern how we function in God's church (1Cor. 1:29-31). The principle of *holiness* (separation from wrong) should govern what is *not* tolerated or loved in God's house and our lives (2Cor. 7:1).

Sometimes principles will be discovered in the actions and example of God's people recorded in Scripture. Parents not only teach children by precept but by example. Often times we can see what pleases God by observing His record of what His faithful ones did.

3. **Purpose** Once a son's decision has been filtered first through precept and then principle, he should ask, "What purpose will this accomplish?" Will it honor God's Son and will it promote godly growth (edification) in the body of Christ? For "all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1Cor. 10:23).

4. **Preference** God even allows for preference if the first 3 are satisfied. What you eat or drink along with many other things can come under the umbrella of a sincere conscience. Here God says, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own *mind*" (Rom. 14:5).

The above requires mature responsibility and takes time as you search His Word in prayer, trusting His Spirit to enlighten. May we abstain from legislating to God's sons our personal rules in order to get them to "line up," but rather point their hearts first to the Father where they will discover His will as revealed in His Word. God is able to reveal things to them, Philp. 3:15, and when resisted will even chastise them to get their attention – because they are His sons (Heb. 12:7).

Chronicle #3 of 'The Christian Life' series
looks at the principle of faith that pleases God J & R

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The Chronicles of the
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2

Sons: A New Lifestyle

The New Testament at first glance seems to lack details of how the Christian life as well as the local church should function and govern itself. There is no concise list of commandments contained in God's Word which addresses issues of the local church in a point by point way. There is no set of explicit instructions such as in the Mosaic Law which spells out what we are to do and how we are to do it. Finely broken-down instructions, about what we are to wear, eat, drink and how to worship, etc. are sparse in the New Testament.

Therefore, many believe that what we do in the church makes no difference as long as people are getting saved. They believe that this apparent lack of instruction in the New Testament concerning church practice, government and lifestyle means that we are completely free to do things as they seem best to us. They believe that for the gospel's sake, we need to adapt to the culture to maximize the message to the lost.