

Dr. David L. Mathewson, New Testament Theology, Session 28, Obedience of the People of God

© 2024 Dave Mathewson and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 28, Obedience of the People of God.

What we want to do in the last couple of sessions is look at the theme of obedience and how it works in the life of God's people, such as obedience and the people of God.

We'll do two sessions where we look at the broader theme of obedience as a response of God's people to his gracious acts on their behalf, particularly in light of Christ, and then a section where we just very briefly make some brief comments on a very complex topic, and that is the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament law. When we think in terms of obedience and the response of God's people, what role does the Old Testament law play in all that? And then, what I want to do for our very last session is we'll end by looking at two passages. Actually, these two texts that we've referred to on numerous occasions in relationship to other themes, and what I want to do is work those passages again in detail and demonstrate how a biblical theological approach illuminates those texts and how those texts contribute to biblical theology. Much of what we say will not be anything new, but simply drawing together a number of threads and themes and notions that we've referred to elsewhere throughout the course of this course, and bring them all together in trying to unpack these passages and show us how biblical theology is valuable for understanding texts and how texts contribute to and lead us to construct a biblical theology.

But first of all, I want to look at the theme of the obedience of the people of God. One of the most significant themes that weaves its way throughout both the Old and New Testaments is the theme of faith. Faith is the proper response of God's people to God's provision for their salvation that has now, in the New Testament, been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, faith is trusting in God's promises. It is trusting in Jesus' own death and resurrection for the provision of our salvation. At least in Paul's letters, probably the most common and the most explicit expression of this is found in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 8 and 9, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not from yourselves. It is a gift of God. It's not by works so that no one will boast.

So, faith is the only appropriate response to God's gracious provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul contrasts that with our own works, which would enable us to boast of our achievements. But instead, faith is the only way to appropriate God's gracious provisions of salvation through a response of faith to Jesus Christ.

Yet we'll see as well, though, in the New Testament, faith is never at odds with and is always accompanied by obedience and good works by God's people. Beginning in the Old Testament, we see this. God's commandments, especially through his Old Testament law, God's will is communicated primarily through the law that he graciously gives to Moses and he graciously gives to his people.

However, it's important to understand that even in the Old Testament, that the law is not divorced from God's grace and reliance on God's gracious provision. So, if you go back to Exodus chapter 20, in the very beginning of God giving the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, and his law to Moses, in Exodus chapter 20, we find that before God does that and spells out his requirements for God's people, 20 begins, and God spoke all these words, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Then, what follows is a list of the commands that God gives to his people.

In other words, God's giving of the law depends on his prior act of redemption, his prior provision for his people, the fact that he is their God and they are to be his people, and his prior act of redeeming his people out of Egypt. So, once more, the law is not given as something that will merit God's favor and blessing; instead, the law is a response to what God has already done for his people. We also see the importance of obedience and understanding obedience within the framework of the New Covenant.

I won't at this time read those texts again, but Ezekiel, especially Jeremiah chapter 31, and God's promise to write the law on their hearts to enable them to keep it and obey it. Ezekiel chapter 36 is also where God promises to pour out his spirit on them to give them a new heart, enabling them to respond in obedience to God's law. So the promises of the New Covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel are, I think, crucial for understanding the New Testament because they anticipate a time when God will pour out his spirit, when he will write his law on the hearts of his people, enabling them to keep his commands.

And so, we'll see in the New Testament that since the New Covenant has clearly been inaugurated, we looked at that in terms of Hebrews and even Paul, the Pauline literature, and elsewhere, the Gospels where Jesus clearly inaugurates through his death the New Covenant, the New Covenant carries with it the promise that God would write his law on their hearts and pour out his spirit, enabling them to keep his commands. So then, when we get to the New Testament, in the New Testament, we find that those who respond in faith to God's gracious provision of his Son, Jesus

Christ, and his death and resurrection will also respond in obedience and with a transformed life. So again, we find in the New Testament that faith and a transformed life are not at odds with each other but instead accompany each other and cannot be divorced.

A transformed life is then enabled by and motivated by God's gracious provision in Jesus Christ, which is what God has done for his people in Christ Jesus. We begin to see this already in, for example, in the Gospels in Mark chapter 1 and verse 15 and the parallels as well in the other Gospels. In chapter 1, verse 15 of Mark, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, we find verse 14, which says that after John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God.

The time has come, he said, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. So, notice the combination of belief and repentance.

Faith in Christ also implies turning away from evil, turning away from sinfulness, and embracing Jesus Christ in faith in obedience. In fact, Thomas Schreiner says in his New Testament theology it is unthinkable that the new relationship to Jesus would be anything less than life-transforming. And I fully agree.

So, Jesus comes offering the kingdom of God, but it requires a response of faith, as well as a response of repentance or turning away from sin. So, we see the significance of obedience in relation to one's response to faith. Faith in Christ brings a turning away from sin and a turning towards Him.

We see, for example, in Matthew chapter 25, I won't read this text, but at the very end of Matthew chapter 25, the so-called parable of the sheep and the goats, where a parable probably referring to God's future judgment of His people, which is based solely on their obedience, which is based on their works, and that becomes the criteria for whether they will enter God's future kingdom or not. We see numerous references elsewhere, in Luke chapter 8, verses 11-15, where bearing fruit, once again, bearing fruit is the criteria for going free on the day of judgment. And we find other examples of that through the Gospels, where Jesus expects that His followers will demonstrate faith in Him and repentance by a transformed life and by obedience.

Probably the most crucial example of this is found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and we'll look at Matthew's version of that in Matthew chapter 5-7. But the Sermon on the Mount is probably the most significant and at least the most complete example, in a sense, and the most well-known example and fullest example of Jesus' ethical teaching and what He requires of His people. And there are different ways of understanding the Sermon on the Mount that we find in both Matthew 5-7, and then you find it in Luke's Gospel as well.

Matthew has a fuller, lengthier account, but probably both are the same Sermon. Each writer emphasizes different things in their accounts of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But the Sermon on the Mount has been understood in different ways throughout church history. Some have understood the Sermon as an ethic for transforming society, so this is something that should be enacted and put into effect and put into practice in our society to bring about change and transformation.

The difficulty with that is that we'll see in just a moment that Jesus clearly is addressing not just society in general but also His followers. And especially when we look at the Beatitudes that begin, blessed are the poor in spirit, etc. When we look at those in a moment, we'll see that Jesus has in mind a specific person or specific people who will put the Sermon on the Mount into practice.

So, it doesn't seem to me that the Sermon is primarily an ethic for society, but it assumes a relationship with Jesus Christ, that it's His followers who will put this into practice. Another common approach advocated, especially by Martin Luther, was that the Sermon on the Mount is primarily meant to show us how far we fall short, to show us our sinfulness, and to show us that we can't keep the law, and to show us that we're morally bankrupt, and to drive us to Christ therefore, to show us our need of a Savior, and to drive us to complete reliance on God's grace. So, I read the Sermon on the Mount, and I try to put it into practice, but it demonstrates that I can't.

And it's sort of a preparation for the Gospel. Now, there's certainly some truth to that. We'll see when we look at the Beatitudes again that there's some truth to that.

But once more, by giving and Matthew recording the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount over such a long space, it's difficult to think that Matthew would record all of this and not expect to some degree that this was Jesus' instruction, that He expected people to actually follow, and thought that they could actually put it into practice to some degree. It's more than just a preparation for the Gospel or to show me how much I fail and how much I need a Savior. So, third, I think the best way to look at the Sermon on the Mount is to see it as an ethic for the Kingdom.

This is a genuine ethic for God's people who belong to God's Kingdom, and again, if you put this in the context of Matthew 3 and 4, Jesus comes preaching the Kingdom of God, and Jesus now comes to not only offer the Kingdom to those who will believe and repent and respond to Him in belief but now also to instruct His people how to live life as those who belong to the Kingdom. Jesus teaches His followers what is required of those who will enter the Kingdom, the rule of God.

We should probably also understand the Kingdom, or the Sermon on the Mount, within, and here's our famous phrase again: the already but not yet tension. That is, Jesus expects that the Sermon on the Mount can already become a reality in the life

of the people. He expects that God's people will be able, to some degree, to substantially follow the demands of the Sermon on the Mount.

Even though it has not yet been realized perfectly until the coming Kingdom, So, because of that, I think we need to read the Sermon on the Mount as a genuine ethic for God's people who have entered God's Kingdom, that Jesus expects His followers to conform their lives to His instructions found in the Sermon on the Mount. Now, to further understand the Sermon, I think we need to go back to the Beatitudes at the very beginning of it, which I think provide a context for understanding it.

And also, we need to put it within the context of what's going on in chapters 3 and 4 of Matthew more generally. When you start with the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and verses 3-11, it's interesting that before Jesus begins to instruct His people as to how to live life as part of God's Kingdom, what is required of those, the ethic that is required of those who would come under God's Kingdom rule, He begins by describing the people who will put the Sermon on the Mount into practice, and the people that He's addressing. And let me just look at a couple of these.

It begins, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. And then, blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Now, let me stop right there with those. First of all, notice that Matthew begins, and Jesus begins by saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit.

In other words, Jesus pronounces a blessing upon the one who is poor in spirit or the one who recognizes his or her moral bankruptcy. The one who is poor in spirit has nothing to offer God. The one who is poor in spirit stands spiritually empty or spiritually bankrupt before God.

And then, blessed are those who mourn. The mourning is not sorrow here, because of pain, or sadness because of the loss of a loved one, or sadness because I lost my job, or life is just miserable, and the pain in my life, and things like that. But the mourning here, in light of the Old Testament background, is mourning for sin.

It's a sign of repentance. So, the one who is poor in spirit, who stands bankrupt spiritually before God and empty before God, mourns in repentance because of sin in his or her own life, in one's own life. And perhaps sin and injustice in the world.

And that causes that person to mourn. And then verse 6 seems to follow. Then blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness that we find spelled out in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Those that hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness in the world, in their own lives, because of their spiritual bankruptcy, because they now mourn for sin in the world and in their own lives, now they hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice, and God fills them. So ultimately, then, the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount is something that can only be accomplished by those who come in repentance before God, and those who come recognizing their bankruptcy spiritually, and their inability to keep the law and to keep God's requirements, and instead, they hunger and thirst for righteousness that God himself will fill them with.

So the Sermon on the Mount is far more and is to be distanced from this view that somehow this is a worked righteousness that we read about in the Sermon on the Mount. I think it was Martin Luther and others who were convinced that there was no gospel in the Sermon on the Mount. I would disagree.

When you read the Beatitudes, it seems to be clearly in step with the gospel. The only way that one can live out the life of the Sermon on the Mount is to recognize our need for God's grace and forgiveness and his ability and enabling power to put the Sermon on the Mount into practice, to live out the righteous requirements of God's kingdom. Furthermore, I think it's important to understand the Sermon on the Mount, and we're not going to look at all the details.

I'm just looking at the Sermon in general. You can read through it in just a few minutes. But instead, I want to put it in its context once again, and that is the Sermon on the Mount, which is in the context of the arrival of the kingdom of God.

In fact, in the first Beatitude, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And we find Jesus then, in chapter 4, coming to perform the works of the kingdom by healing, but also to teach and proclaim and preach the kingdom of God.

So, Matthew chapter 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, assumes the arrival of God's kingdom. That is, the Sermon on the Mount can only be carried out within and under the transforming power of God's kingdom. The power of God's kingdom is a prerequisite for living out the life demanded by the Sermon on the Mount.

So again, this is not a work of righteousness, something that Jesus is asking us to do. But now, as Christians who have been saved by God's grace, we don't need to pay as much attention to the Sermon, nor is it merely there to show us our sinfulness and our need for a Savior. Yes, it does that.

But ultimately, the Sermon on the Mount assumes as its prerequisite the transforming power of God's kingdom to enable it to be put into practice. Just a

couple of other references before we look particularly at Paul's letters and what they say about obedience and the response of obedience to God's gracious provision in Christ, which I think that phrase could sum up. The Sermon on the Mount, but I think the entirety of the theme of Christian obedience, and that is Christian obedience, is the response of a transformed life that is a response to God's gracious provision for His people in Jesus Christ.

To move to another gospel, we could stop and look and find similar emphases. But John chapter 15 is one more example of Jesus' instruction to His people. John chapter 15, where Jesus teaches His disciples by using the metaphor of the vine and the branches, and we looked at that in terms of what that says about the theme of people of God.

But also, Jesus makes it clear that the only way that God's people can live the kind of life God requires is by virtue of remaining in Christ or being connected to Christ, who is the true vine. So, in chapter 15 and verse 10, Jesus says, If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love. Earlier, Jesus made clear, starting in chapter 15 and verse 1, that I am the true vine and that my Father is the gardener.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will become even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the words I have spoken to you. Remain in me as I also remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. So, the only way to keep His commands, the only way to bear fruit, is by remaining in and depending on the vine, which is Jesus Christ.

So, remaining in Jesus Christ is a prerequisite for producing fruit and keeping Jesus' commands. The book of Acts, I don't want to point to any one specific text, but the book of Acts likewise demonstrates that faith and repentance are both necessary for salvation. So, the appropriate response to Jesus and to the gospel is one of faith, but that is accompanied by repentance or turning from sin.

By the way, you often hear that repentance literally means changing one's mind. That's not quite accurate. Repentance in the New Testament suggests the turning of the entire self.

Yes, there's an intellectual component of changing one's mind about something and what one thinks, but that's accompanied by a reorientation and a change of the whole life, the whole will towards God in turning from sin and responding in obedience. So, in a sense, faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. So, what I want to do is move on to the Pauline literature and look at several texts which spell out in more detail some of the things we've already seen in the gospels, but also

the need to respond in obedience and live life in response to the gracious provision of God in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection.

The starting point, to just make a general comment before looking at a couple of specific texts just to make a general comment in relationship to Paul's teaching and Paul's ethics, is to draw attention to the significance of the New Covenant in Paul's thought. Now, we've already looked at the theme of New Covenant, and we've seen that in texts like 2 Corinthians 3, in Paul's mention of forgiveness of sins, the fact that the Holy Spirit has been poured out on us, that we receive the Spirit and participate in the Holy Spirit of God, all of those are related back to New Covenant. So, forgiveness of sins and receiving the Spirit are blessings of the New Covenant, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, but in a text like 2 Corinthians 3, Paul is even more explicit that the New Covenant has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

But what I want to draw attention to again is that in the New Covenant, as we see again, particularly in Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31, the New Covenant promises that God will write His law on our hearts. He promises that He will give us a new heart. He promises that He will pour out His Spirit upon us to enable us to keep God's commands.

And this is what distinguishes, one of the primary distinguishing features, between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant under Moses is now the New Covenant enables God's people to keep God's commands by again Him writing them in their hearts, God giving them a new heart, pouring out His Spirit upon them. So, by definition, God's New Covenant people must live a transformed life. There can be no such thing as a Christian who does not reflect the transformed life of the New Covenant to some degree.

Because by definition, if the New Covenant has now been inaugurated, and by faith in Christ, we now participate in the New Covenant, we are now people of the New Covenant, and belong to the New Covenant, it's fulfilled in us, then by definition, the New Covenant promises that God will write His law on our hearts. He will give us a new heart, pour out His Spirit, and enable us to keep it. So, if we live under the New Covenant, if the New Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ, and we have the Holy Spirit, then inevitably, we will demonstrate the reality of New Covenant salvation by obedience and good works, by a response of a transformed life.

So, the New Covenant is important and significant for understanding Paul's, or I think the entire New Testament's, emphasis on obedience and a transformed life. Again, it's not simply to use common terminology; it's not simply a list of, here's what God wants us to do, and here's what He doesn't want us to do if we're to be good Christians. But it's all in the context of God's New Covenant relationship with His people.

So, to look at a handful of texts in a little bit more detail, where Paul addresses the issue of the obedience of God's people to Jesus Christ and God's commands and God's requirements or desires of His people, is the first, the starting point, is Galatians chapter 5. And we've already looked at that in another context. But again, Galatians chapter 5 is significant because it understands Christian obedience once more in the context of God's New Covenant Holy Spirit or producing the fruit of the Spirit. So we've, the most well-known part of this is verse 22.

Actually, after verses 19 and 21, where Paul spells out the deeds of the flesh, that is, I think the deeds that belong to myself belong to the old era that the law cannot ultimately overcome and do away with. But now verses 22 and 23 spell out the fruit of the Spirit. That is, this is the kind of life engendered by living under the New Covenant Holy Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control against things there is no law. So, in other words, righteousness or a transformed life is the inevitable result of living life or walking in the New Covenant Holy Spirit that has now been poured out on believers in fulfillment, again, of the Old Testament promises of God pouring out His Spirit. Now, I take it from this text that Paul is not suggesting that somehow, this is simply automatic and that Christians have no responsibility to do anything.

But certainly, in the context of his discussion in Galatians addressing Christians that are tempted to go back under the Old Testament law, to submit to the Old Testament law, Paul reminds them that true obedience, which we are responsible for, is ultimately only the result of the New Covenant Holy Spirit that has been poured out in us. So again, life in the Spirit leads to a new way of life or leads to transformation. It's interesting then, after this, in chapter 6 of Galatians, we'll return to talk about this a little bit later on, but in chapter 6 of Galatians, Paul is quite happy to give them several commands.

So he begins by saying, Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. So, living by the Spirit does not absolve God's people of responsibility for living out life in the context of the fruit of the Spirit. Verse 1 ends, But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. We'll talk about that phrase just a little bit later on. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.

Each one should test their own actions. Then, they can take pride in themselves alone without comparing themselves to someone else. My purpose is not to go into detail on what these commands entail, but simply to note that even in the context of living life under the Holy Spirit, those who are in the Spirit, Paul still gives them

commands that he expects that they will follow, and commands them to watch out, lest they also are tempted, suggesting that they could be.

So, Paul puts flesh on the bones to show what it looks like to live life in the Spirit. Then Paul puts flesh on the bones in chapter 6 of Galatians to show what that looks like. Another important text, and probably the most familiar of the ones that I'll discuss, is Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 8 through 10.

Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 8 through 10, starting with verse 8, For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it's a gift of God, it's not by work so that no one can boast. We know that well, as a text we often use to demonstrate that salvation does not come about by human effort but only by God's gracious act to which we respond solely by faith. But verse 10 goes on, For we are God's, the NIV says handiwork, but I like we are God's creation, or we are God's work, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In other words, now Paul goes further and says we have been created for good works. I think Paul is alluding back to new creation imagery from the Old Testament and new creation imagery that he uses elsewhere. 2 Corinthians 5, for example, 5.17 and 18.

We are now part of a new creation that means good works. We've been created in Christ Jesus as part of a new creation, now in Christ Jesus, that entails a transformed life that produces the fruit of the new creation or produces the works of the new creation. So, belonging to a new creation brings about a transformation where we produce the fruit and transform the life of the new creation.

So that once more, faith and good works are not at odds with each other. We'll return to this a little bit later on, but Paul wants to make it clear that those who have faith in Christ now belong to a new creation, which inevitably entails a transformed life. Therefore, he expects that good works will be the inevitable result of one who has been saved by God's grace through faith, which brings them into and entails belonging now to a new creation, which entails a transformed life of producing the fruit of the new creation.

Romans chapter 6 is probably one of the more crucial texts for understanding obedience and the role of obedience and works in the life of God's people. Romans chapter 6 actually begins as probably a response to a hypothetical objection or it could have been a genuine objection that someone had raised or was raising to Paul's preaching. But chapter 6 begins with a question that raises an objection to what Paul is saying based on something he said back in chapter 5. And in chapter 5 where Paul compares and contrasts Adam and Christ, he ends by saying, the law was

brought in so that trespasses might increase, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

So, you can even imagine someone objecting to that, and Paul anticipates that in chapter 6. Well, if that's true, if where sin increases, grace increases all the more, then it really doesn't matter if I sin because that simply will increase grace. Because Paul just said where sin increases, grace increases all the more. But Paul responds to that objection by asking how that can be. You who have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer? In other words, Paul is convinced that the idea is simply ludicrous.

That Christians can go on sinning just to make grace increase or that sin is inconsequential in the life of God's people because grace is more than enough to take care of it and cover it. And so, Paul says, how can you conclude something like that when you have actually died to sin? How can you live in sin when you've died to it? The idea again of dying to sin is that death is what is necessary to bring to an end the rule and reign of sin in the life of God's people. Now, obviously, the people to whom Paul was writing and we as readers today are still alive and breathing for the moment.

So we can ask, how can Paul say something like, you've died to sin. That is, you've experienced a death that brings to an end the reign of the present evil age and the reign of sin in your life. How can he say that we've experienced a death? Well, he goes on and explains, it's by virtue of being united to Christ in his death.

Verse 3, Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? That is, by being joined to Christ through faith, we have died to sin because we have been joined to someone who has, in fact, died. Who has, in fact, literally and actually died, bringing to an end the reign of death and the reign of the present evil era. We have participated in that death by virtue of being joined to Jesus Christ.

But Paul goes further and says it's not enough that we've been joined to Christ's death, and it's put to death the reign of death in our lives and the reign of the old era. Instead, we have also been united with Christ in his resurrection to walk in the newness of life. In other words, this once more is the language of the new creation.

We now begin to experience the resurrection existence of the new creation by being joined and united to Jesus Christ's own resurrection, which is the beginning of the new creation. And therefore, later on, in chapters 12-14, Paul will say, therefore, we are no longer enslaved to sin. It's no longer our master, and we can no longer offer ourselves as slaves to sin.

Instead, the only option is to offer ourselves as slaves and servants of righteousness as our master. That is, the new creational existence in Christ has now become the

basis for the ethical exhortations in the rest of the gospel. We already see Paul's implications for Christian living in verse 4. Being joined to Christ in his resurrection means that now we can walk in the newness of life.

And Paul then, starting in verse 12, unpacks that in more detail. But the whole point is that the new creational existence in Christ, the fact that I've been united with Christ in his resurrection, as the inauguration of the new creation, becomes the basis for the exhortations starting with verse 12 in the rest of the chapter. This is what scholars often call; whether you want to use this language or not, grammatically, it's a little bit confusing because it doesn't necessarily always match up strictly with the grammar implied in these labels.

But scholars often talk about the indicative and the imperative. The indicative is a description of what God has done for us in Christ. It refers to our union with Christ, the fact that we've died to sin and we've been raised with him.

In chapter 6, Paul also says in verse 6 of Romans, For we know that our old self or old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with. Again, I think the old man and the body of sin is a way of describing who I am as belonging to the old era, as ruled and under the authority and rule of the old era in Adam, under the influence and control of the old era. Now, that has been put to death.

Notice the strong and stark language. Paul says the old self has been put to death. He doesn't say it's been hampered a little bit or it's been tied.

It's sort of been rendered ineffective. No, he uses very strong language. The old self, who I am belonging to the old era of sin and death, under its rule and control, has now been put to death.

It's died, again, by virtue of the fact that I have been united with Christ's own death. So that's the indicative. He goes on to say that now we share in the new creation life of Jesus' own resurrection.

So that's the indicative, what is true by virtue of the fact of belonging to Jesus Christ and being united with Christ in his death and in his resurrection, which inaugurates a new creation. But that only enables and leads to the imperative in verses 12 and following so that the imperative is based on the indicative.

And the indicative leads to and enables the imperative. This is part of that already but not yet tension. The indicative explains what is already true by virtue of who I am in union with Jesus Christ.

The imperative, the commands are necessary because we still live in the not yet and await the final consummation. But the indicative, who I am in Christ, I've died to sin.

Who I am, the old man, who I am in Adam, belonging to the old era, has been put to death.

I've been united to Christ in his resurrection and experienced the inaugurated new creation. That is the indicative. That then enables and provides the motivation for the imperative, which is to live that out in the not yet of my existence.

To then live that out in a transformed life and a life of obedience. So, Romans chapter 6 is very important for understanding Paul's ethics. We find something similar when we get to Ephesians chapter 4 and verses 20 through 32.

I won't read the entirety of that. But Ephesians chapter 4 and verses 20 through 32. I think we should read this in a similar way to what we saw in Romans chapter 6. But 4:20 through 32 of Ephesians.

Let's see. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for you are members of one body.

If in your anger, do not sin, do not let the sun go down while you are angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer. But they must work doing something useful with their own hands so that they may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any wholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful. And we can go on and read the other commands as well. But what I want to do is back up and read the section that comes before that.

So, notice this string of imperatives in verses 25 and following. But in 20 through 24, Paul says, That, however, is not the way of life that you learned. When you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth, that is, in Jesus, you were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its sinful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self-created to be like God in true righteousness and true holiness.

Now we see something similar in Colossians chapter 3 and verses 10 and 11. Actually, verses 9 and 10. Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and you have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

Now, what I want you to notice is two things. Number one is the language of the old self and the new self. I actually like the translation old man and new man, not because it's gender exclusive, but because I think it captures the notion of who I am in Adam, the old man, and who I am in Christ, the new man.

So, the reference to old man and new man, often translated as old self and new self, is a reference to who I am, again, under the control of the present evil age, under bondage of sin and death in Adam, as opposed to now belonging to the new era of salvation, characterized by righteousness, life, and God's Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus, who I am in Christ under his sphere of authority and rule. That would be indicative. The indicative refers to what God has done for me by virtue of my union with Christ.

So again, going back to Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 4, in verses 22 and 24, we find the indicative of what God has done. In Colossians 3, verses 10 and 11, we find the indicative of what God has done. We've put off the old man, who I am in Adam, under the rule and control and sphere of the old era and its practices, and now we have put on the new man, who I am in Christ. We put on Jesus Christ and the new era that I now belong to in Christ Jesus.

We've put off one, and we've put on the other, which provides the enablement and the motivation for living out the surrounding imperatives, for living out the surrounding commands in both Ephesians and Colossians. The other thing to note about Ephesians and Colossians, Colossians chapter 3, the other thing interesting to note about Ephesians and Colossians, both Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, is that to kind of take a little bit different direction, more specifically, is that Paul's instructions, his ethics, are presented in a corporate context. In other words, for Paul, especially in Ephesians and Colossians, I would argue elsewhere as well that ethics are not individual, but they're done within the context of a community.

Paul has in mind not just the renewal of individuals, though it would include that, but the renewal of an entire community. And it's only in relationship to the community that the transformation of God's people can take place. In fact, when you read these commands in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, most of them are things that can only be accomplished and done in the context of a community.

For example, not in isolation. So, look at chapter 3. Therefore, as God's chosen people holy in love, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if anyone has a grievance.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you above all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

That's not a reference to having a feeling of peace, an overwhelming peace in my life. But peace is, in the context of our discussion of reconciliation earlier, the absence of conflict within the community. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

Since you are members of one body, you are called to peace. That is, it's the absence of conflict and animosity and warfare and fighting within the Christian community. And be thankful.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another. Now, my question is, how can you do these things in isolation? How can you teach and admonish one another in isolation? How can you forgive one another? How can you demonstrate compassion? How can you forbear with one another? How can you be at peace with each other in isolation? So, these are all virtues that Paul expects us to live out in relationship to one another within the context of the community. So that transformation takes place, not just as individuals but in the context of the community of God's people, the church.

So to summarize Paul's instructions to this point, or his ethics or teaching on obedience and a transformed life, in Paul, we find the instructions to separate from sin, the instructions to pursue obedience, are based on the fact that God's people have already laid aside, or they've already separated from the old self of the old era, and now they have put on the new self, or the new man, belonging to their union with Christ and belonging to their new creational existence in Christ Jesus. So that the new creation provides the transforming power to obey Paul's commands. The process of putting off the old man and putting on the new creational being, of course, in Paul, is something that is not yet complete.

It shares in that already but not yet tension because we still live in this present evil era. We still live in these present though weakened and corrupted bodies. So, until then, the imperatives and the commands are necessary.

But the new creational beings that we are in Christ Jesus provide both the motivation for and the enablement for living out a renewed life, the life of those who now belong to Jesus Christ, and the new creation that he inaugurates through his resurrection. So, the new creational beings that we are in Christ are being renewed, continually being renewed. If you recall, back in Colossians chapter 3, Paul refers to the new man, which we've put on the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge, in the image of its creator.

So, as new creational beings in Christ, we are in Christ, but we are being renewed as we continually live out the new creation, as we continually live out lives of obedience that produce the fruit of the new creation through life in the Holy Spirit. Now what I want to do is just briefly introduce James and the book of James is probably the book in the New Testament that most focuses on Christian obedience and good works and good deeds produced by the people of God. But it's also important to understand once more the context in which James places that.

So, for example, in chapter 1 and verses 8-22, sometimes it's James' focus on obedience and good works that historically has caused many Christians to question its value or they're not sure what to do with it. Martin Luther is well known for saying, as tradition has it, that it was a right strawy epistle. He didn't know what to do with it in light of Paul's emphasis on faith in Jesus Christ and God's grace.

Then he comes to James and finds James stressing obedience and the good works of God's people. But in James chapter 1 and verses 18-22, James says, He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creation. So, once more, James uses creation language.

We've been given a new birth, and we already belong to a new creation. And then he goes on in verses 19-20, My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word that is implanted in you and that can save you. In other words, even for James, obedience and producing the righteousness of God is in the context of a new creation and the implanted word that is able to save us. So, even for James, obedience is ultimately the product of living under the new creation reality and is produced by the transforming power of God's word.

So even for James, obedience is not something we muster up on our own, or we produce under our own effort but ultimately is part of the fact that we've already been given birth, new birth as part of the new creation and live under the transforming power of God's word which is able to save us. Now, probably the most interesting and crucial text in James is found in chapter 2, and it's the one that is often seen in conflict with Paul's teaching. So, in our next section, I want to begin by looking at James's chapter 2 and what it says about Christian obedience within the context of Paul's teaching.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture series on New Testament Theology. This is session 28, Obedience of the People of God.