

# **Basics of the Christian Life Series**

## **The Behavior of the Christian Life**

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**By**  
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# The Behavior of the Christian Life

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Holding Onto Jesus<sup>1</sup>

1. Here is an online exchange between Dr. Michael Kruger, William Fisher, and Chris Ratcliffe on an article by Dr. Michael Kruger reviewing the book of Dr. S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin Grams titled *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition*. Lessons learned through this conversation are very significant for us today.
2. William begins, “Yes, it is doubtless true that, up until comparatively recently—and with the possible exception of only a very small number of dissenters of whom history has left us no record—Christians generally have believed that any homosexual behavior in any circumstances is morally wrong. But we have finally moved on, thank God.” which drew a reply from Michael, “Thanks, William. But, not sure who you mean by ‘we.’ If you mean ‘we’ Christians, then you are mistaken. As I observed in the article, Christianity is fundamentally opposed to homosexuality and so it cannot ‘move on.’ If you mean that you personally are happy about the advance of homosexuality, then you are free to hold that view. But, that is not a ‘we’ thing. That is simply a ‘you’ thing.
3. William responded, “Yes, that was a bit sloppy of me, I must admit. By ‘we’ I mean more and more of us, including more and more Christians—not all, obviously.” Chris added, “I agree with William.” Michael counters, “That’s fine, Chris. But, I can only assume that you have renounced Christianity as well. As shown by my article, there is not a compatibility between Christianity and the embracing of homosexuality. You are free to embrace the latter, but at the expense of the former. You are not in a position to simply rewrite the Bible and rewrite all of church history.”
4. William continues, “You don’t need to re-write things in order to move on. You just move on.” Michael says, “That’s fine. But you are moving on without Jesus and without Christianity. As long as that is clear.” To which William disagrees, “On that we shall just have to agree to disagree.”
5. “You are free to disagree, but your disagreement is without a foundation. For you to continue to claim Christ himself and the Word he delivered and the church he planted, all three of which definitively reject homosexuality, is beyond stunning. You reject all three under the banner of ‘I know better than Jesus, the Bible, and all of church history.’ I would think that reality would at least give you a little cause for self-reflection. Are you really so confident in yourself? I challenge you to be honest and just admit you believe something that is at odds with everything Christianity stands for. That is a more honorable, more rational, and more sensible path than insisting,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.michaelkruger.com/one-of-the-most-original-books-on-homosexuality-in-years/> Accessed 8/7/19

against all reason and history, that Christianity embraces what you believe.” Michael concluded the conversation no more comments followed by William or Chris.

- B. I hope you noticed what is going on here. There is something really important in this exchange that I want you to see because each of us has a tendency to do the same thing and this tendency is harmful to us. The individuals with whom Michael is having this discussion desperately want to hold onto Jesus while rejecting what Jesus, through His Spirit (the Holy Spirit), communicated on the subject of homosexuality as recorded in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> There is a desire to have Jesus adopt the perspective we want Him to have. They want to dismiss the long history of Christianity (called historic or classical Christianity) in favor of their own personal views. This trend is becoming very common today. Many people want to create their own version of Christianity and act like it is the real thing even though it contradicts what Christianity has been for two thousand years.
- C. One of the most frequently mentioned complaints against Christians is that the church is full of hypocrites. This is usually used as an excuse to stop participating in church because the person doesn’t like church anyway or as a way to dismiss having to take Jesus and Christianity seriously. Hypocrites claim to be following Jesus but their lives violate the teachings of Jesus. Individuals in the church don’t behave the way they should. A lack of consistency and integrity exists. There seems to be a never ending string of people who don’t behave like Jesus as though there are only a precious few Christians who live a consistent Christian life. These complaints are justified.<sup>3</sup> These challengers correctly identify a connection between Jesus and a specific lifestyle.
- D. The Christian life is attached to a particular type of lifestyle. Ironically, this truth is sometimes more deeply reflected in the challenge of the critics of Christianity than the thinking of some Christians. If someone claims to be a Christian while their life doesn’t match the Christian lifestyle, they are deceiving themselves and are lying about their true condition. The Christian life is the type of living that is described and demonstrated by Jesus, “<sup>6</sup> the one who says he abides in Him [Jesus] ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” (1 Jn. 2:6). The life of Jesus defines the Christian lifestyle in both its character and activities. Therefore, if a person’s life doesn’t progressively look like the life of Jesus, there is a major problem regarding their claim to be following Jesus.
- E. However, there is something deeper that is necessary in order to live a life that is truly pleasing to God that mere outward behavior: the right actions along with the right motivations. God’s standard is much higher than the critic of Christianity. Merely doing the right actions isn’t sufficient to live rightly before God. If we want to live a life that is pleasing to God, we must

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<sup>2</sup> All of Scripture comes from God through the Holy Spirit and therefore is coming from Jesus who is God. This means anything the Bible says on homosexuality can be taken to reflect the views of Jesus. We don’t have to limit ourselves to only the statements of Jesus found in the gospels. Further, we can take the words of those who were personally trained by Jesus as coming from Jesus, such as the case of Paul in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note the key difference that is often unnoticed by those who bring up the charge of hypocrisy. There is a big difference between people who think they are Christian and claim to be following Jesus verses those who actually belong to God and their lives give evidence of that reality. This challenge is used incorrectly in many cases because the people being observed aren’t actually Christians even though they think they are. Just because a person claims to be a Christian, doesn’t mean they are one.

understand the motivating factor which energizes the Christian life. We need to know and understand the lifestyle that is connected with Jesus.

## II. Love for God

- A. Central to the type of lifestyle that flows from an attachment to Jesus is an ever growing love for God. Love for God is the motivating factor of the Christian life. Jesus made this clear, <sup>34</sup> “But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, <sup>36</sup> ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ <sup>37</sup> And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’” <sup>38</sup> This is the great and foremost commandment.” (Mt. 22:34-38). Jesus says the entire Bible can be summed up by having a love for God. Loving God with our entire being is what the Christian life is all about. Loving God motivates what is pleasing to Him.
- B. In these words, Jesus is echoing the same message as the First Testament, <sup>12</sup> “Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,” (Dt. 10:12). The message of Jesus to love God is nothing new, God through the Bible had been teaching it for a long time. Love for God expressed through wholehearted obedience is the message God had been communicating to His people from the very beginning.
- C. Defining the nature of love for God, is a difficult task. Think about trying to define what romantic love is without pointing to descriptions or examples of romantic love. Since you need to know what a thing is before you can point to it leads us to our need for a definition of the love of God. The skill of classification is required before instances of that thing can be recognized. Identification requires a definition. A red apple can’t be shown to someone else until you know what a red apple is. Despite this difficulty, we need to make an attempt at defining what the love of God is because if we don’t have a definition we might miss it altogether. We might think we are loving God since we are fulfilling what we believe are examples of loving God when in reality we are going through the motions of loving God without actually possessing it. It is easy to become familiar with common instances of loving God, and do them, without the necessary heart orientation that defines what the love of God is. Doing “loving” things for God without actually having a genuine love for God is displeasing to Him. Simply doing the things God tells us to do does not mean we love God.
- D. Love for God is a positive and affectionate heart orientation directed toward God that manifests itself in a person’s thoughts, emotions, attitudes, motivations, values, and behaviors which brings joy to the heart of God. A love for God will have an influence on what a person thinks about God (Mt. 25:24-25, 2 Sam. 22:26-27). God won’t be thought of as cruel, harsh, uncaring, unkind, unloving, or unfair. That is how those who don’t know Jesus perceive God. Those who don’t believe in God have a low opinion of Him while those who do believe in God have a high opinion of Him. God will be viewed as pleasant, patient, gentle, caring, kind, loving, and fair. Someone who loves God will have positive feelings toward Him. They will have attitudes of humility and appreciation for God. A love for God will be concerned about what is best for Him at the expense of self-interests (Jn. 14:28). The things that are important to God

will be important to those who love Him. Love for God will also be expressed through actions that are pleasing and beneficial to God. A true love of God will have an influence on every aspect of a person's being. Think of the greatest expression of love you can come up with, perhaps a young couple about to get married or an older couple who has developed their love over 40 years. How does this love affect them?

- E. The reason followers of Christ have and develop a love for God is because God previously expressed His love toward them, <sup>19</sup>“We love, because He first loved us.” (1 Jn. 4:19). God's love is given before the recipients love Him (Rm. 5:8, Eph. 2:4-5, 1 Jn. 4:10). Followers of Jesus experience the love of God at the cross and respond in kind by starting to love God in return because God puts His love in their hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>“and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Rm. 5:5).
- F. This love for God is to be the strongest force in our lives. Followers of Jesus are to love Him above anyone and anything else, <sup>37</sup>“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” (Mt. 10:37). Jesus leverages the most important relationships in life to make a strong point: Jesus should be loved more than the most cherished person in our lives. That's a strong statement. Why would Jesus demand the most important place in every single person's life? What right does Jesus think He has to make such an aggressive claim? This only makes sense if Jesus is God. Jesus is asking for the worship, respect, love, and loyalty that God rightfully deserves.
- G. How do we increase our love for God? How do we make Jesus the love of our life? We love God more the more we understand the depth of our guilt and moral corruption. Jesus said this, <sup>47</sup>“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” (Lk. 7:47). Jesus used the example of the woman who cleaned His feet with perfume (Lk. 7:36-50) to make an important point about the spiritual life: the greater the awareness of our own sin, the greater love we will have for Jesus. Understanding the depth of our spiritual danger and the magnificence of Jesus' actions on our behalf to rescue us, will cause us to appreciate what He did and deepen our love for Him. Love for Jesus starts and grows with understanding our guilt. Jesus pointed out that the Pharisee who invited Jesus to His home didn't love Jesus very much since He thought of Himself as a pretty good person who obeyed God's Word. This self-righteous perspective naturally led to a small amount of love since Jesus didn't seem very significant for him personally. However, the woman, who understood the great amount of wrong things she had done appreciated Jesus' offer of forgiveness and as a result of this self-humbling perspective she possessed a great love for Jesus. Regularly evaluating ourselves by God's moral standards and acknowledging our failure before Him will lead to a deeper love of God.

### III. Expressing Love for God

- A. A sincere love for God can be expressed in different ways but there is one that stands above the others because it is mentioned most often in the Bible. We need a heart of love for God and

fear of God<sup>4</sup> at the same time for lasting obedience to be possible. Obedience is motivated by love and respect. If we have a love for God it will be expressed in our behavior as obedience, “<sup>3</sup> By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;” (1 Jn. 2:3-4). Obedience is the most natural expression of our love for Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Jesus goes so far as to define love for Him in terms of obedience. The evidence of a love for God is found in obedient behavior which means the more we learn about the teachings and commands of Jesus, the more our life will be conformed to His. It is impossible to love God without a changing lifestyle. A person can’t love God and keep living like their old self. If a person’s heart and lifestyle looks pretty much the same after turning their life over to Jesus as before their commitment to Jesus, odds are, they still don’t have the love of God in their heart.

- B. Jesus made the exact same point as John and defined love as obedience, “<sup>15</sup> If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (Jn. 14:15) and again, “<sup>21</sup> He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” (Jn. 14:21). Still further, “<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.’” (Jn. 14:23). A true and genuine love for God is one of the primary motivations for obeying God.
- C. We have to ask the question, are we to only obey the specific commands (imperatives) or only the ethical instructions of Jesus? Is this what it means to obey His commands? D.A. Carson describes the heart behind obeying the commands of Jesus, “What the one who loves Jesus will observe is not simply an array of discrete ethical injunctions, but the entire revelation from the Father, revelation holistically conceived (*cf.* Jn. 3:31–32; 12:47–49; 17:6).”<sup>6</sup> A love for God will obey the individual teachings, commands, and ethical instructions of Jesus but it won’t stop there. There will be an adoption of the heart behind the individual statements. The Pharisees got themselves into trouble for not understanding God’s heart behind His Words. Those who love God will not make the same mistake.
- D. It is also important to realize that an authentic love for God includes the attitude with which obedience is approached. Someone with a love for God will not be upset or bitter about their obedience to God. They will not be like a child who picks up their toys simply out of duty and does so with a negative attitude toward the one who gave the command. Sincere love does not mourn the “loss” of what is sacrificed for the object of its affections, obeying God is not difficult for the one who loves Him, “<sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 Jn. 5:3). Those who love God realize that obedience leads to greatness in the eyes of God, “<sup>19</sup> Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of

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<sup>4</sup> This means to have a deep respect for God and His authority

<sup>5</sup> Mt. 10:38, 1 John 5:2

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, [\*The Gospel according to John\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 498.

heaven.” (Mt. 5:19). Obedience is the path of promotion in God’s program, it is an honorable thing. As Augustine said, “I do not exhort you not to love, only not to love the world so as to love more freely the One who has made the world.”<sup>7</sup> When we love Jesus sincerely we will grow to let go without regret. A strong love for Jesus will give up the parts of life that displease Him without sorrow. Their attachment to other things is less significant to them than their love of God (1 Jn. 2:15).

- E. In a culture that idolizes personal choice, freedom, and self-determination, there is a clear need to provide compelling reasons in favor of obedience at the expense of what is thought to be freedom. This is a tough sell for many today, why should we sacrifice our ability to make our own decisions for the sake of doing what God tells us to do? The first reason to obey, obedience is necessary because Jesus rightfully places obligations on us in light of what He’s done on our behalf.<sup>8</sup> Obedience is our proper duty to Jesus. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us while displaying the greatest act of love possible (Jn. 15:13). The appropriate and natural reaction is to love Him by living for Him (Rm. 12:1, 2 Cor. 5:15). Jesus gives those who follow Him their directives, their marching orders, just as God did with the Jews as a response to His bringing them out of slavery in Egypt, “<sup>16</sup> This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Dt. 26:16). It is clearly wrong, to respond to an act of love with hostility and harm. Isn’t it repulsive when a child, who regularly acts out violently against their parents, while those same parents lovingly provide that child with food, clothing, and shelter? Don’t we recognize how awful it is for a lifetime of love to be rejected, despised, and responded to with wrongdoing in return?
- F. Second, God knows that obedience is good for us as He told Moses, “<sup>29</sup> Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!” (Dt. 5:29). Following the Word of God is good and beneficial for us. God thought up humanity and the world by His own wisdom. Therefore, He knows the best way to live life which is reflected in His instructions. It is in our best interest to follow God’s commands which is true in the commands themselves but it is also true because it puts us in a position to be blessed and loved by God in addition to the good that our obedience brings. Obeying God’s Word is good in and of itself but our obedience also puts us in a favorable position with God who is generous with His good gifts.
- G. Third, obedience should be viewed as the pathway to greater experiences of joy and happiness as Jesus taught, “<sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.” (Jn. 15:11). Obedience doesn’t take away joy; it gives joy as God is the source of joy (Ps. 16:11). This is difficult for many to accept but it’s true. Often we think that obeying God requires us to give up desirable activities but this is only because we are attached to the wrong things (Jn. 3:19-20). Our hearts are attached to and delight in sin. Sin, despite its partial and temporary pleasure, causes more damage than the “benefits” it offers. Those things

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<sup>7</sup> Augustine of Hippo, [Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings](#), ed. John Farina, trans. Mary T. Clark, The Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), 231.

<sup>8</sup> Just as the nation of Israel did after being rescued out of Egypt (Dt. 4:39-40).

that we are chasing after that are harmful to us do not satisfy the way they promise; our good desires can be fulfilled better in obedience. The parts of our lives that Jesus asks us to give up in order to be obedient to Him, although appearing desirable, are actually destructive. The reason Jesus tells us to do what He asks is because He knows the right way to deeper levels of joy and satisfaction. Thomas à Kempis puts it this way, “Consider the consolations of creatures as vanity, for the soul that loves God scorns all things that are inferior to Him. God alone, the eternal and infinite, satisfies all, bringing comfort to the soul and true joy to the body.”<sup>9</sup>

- H. This spiritual principle is true in every age: either we have the love of God in us and we will submit and obey Jesus or we don’t have the love of God in us and we will reject Jesus and rebel against what He had to say. Any justifications we might offer for disobeying the words of Jesus or the message of the Bible are fraudulent.<sup>10</sup> If you want to live life as you want, fine, but to do so you must leave Jesus behind. You aren’t allowed to fool yourself and think that Jesus approves of your lifestyle choices. We must either accept Jesus or reject Jesus AS HE PRESENTED HIMSELF. We don’t have the freedom to change what Jesus approves of simply because we want to live the way we want. This message is very important in our current cultural climate. At a time when people feel the freedom to be able to make up their own version of Jesus and call themselves a Christian, the standard of obedience to Jesus is critical. So often today, people want to attach themselves to Jesus, call themselves a Christian, while at the same time living however they want. Some go so far as to claim that Jesus endorses the lifestyle they choose to live. Although this is a common practice today, the Bible says this is what false teachers and false disciples do (2 Tim. 4:3-4, Rm. 1:32).

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. When God tells husbands to love their wives and not be bitter or angry toward them, those husbands who are following Jesus will listen and conform (Col. 3:19). When God tells wives to stop nagging their husbands, they need to obey (Prov. 21:9). When God tells parents to raise up their children so that they know God, this becomes the parents’ primary objective of their parenting (Eph. 6:4); that is, if they are following Jesus with regard to raising their kids. When God says to carry out your job as if Jesus was your boss or supervisor, it will change the work ethic of those who love Jesus (Col. 3:23). When Jesus tells us that we should use our money wisely for His kingdom, we will stop frivolous and selfish spending (Lk. 16:1-13). We can only claim to be following Jesus to the point of our willingness to obey what He said.
- B. The depth of our love for God will be revealed in the extent of our obedience. The Christian life requires a lifestyle that is increasingly conformed to the standards of Jesus. If we have a love for God, we will become like Jesus and our lives will reflect that reality more and more each day. It is inappropriate to claim to be following Jesus while living however we want. Even worse, is trying to convince ourselves that Jesus gives us the freedom to disobey His message.

#### V. Questions For Further Thought

- A. How would you define the love of God in your own words?

<sup>9</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1996), 70.

<sup>10</sup> Common justifications include dismissing the teachings of the Bible on cultural differences, rejecting portions the Bible as merely a difference of interpretation, denying the Bible’s perspective on an issue because science offers a better explanation, etc.



- B. How do the following people express their love for God?
  1. Mary: Matthew 26:6-13
  2. Peter: John 21:7-8
  3. Two disciples: Luke 24:17-41
  4. The female disciples: Matthew 28:1-9
  5. Joseph of Arimathea: Matthew 27:57-60
  6. The demonized man: Mark 5:18
- C. What were these people sacrificing in order to express their love for Jesus?
- D. How might these examples be followed in your life?
- E. Is there anything that you grudgingly give to Jesus in order to obey Him?
- F. How might you let that thing go joyfully?