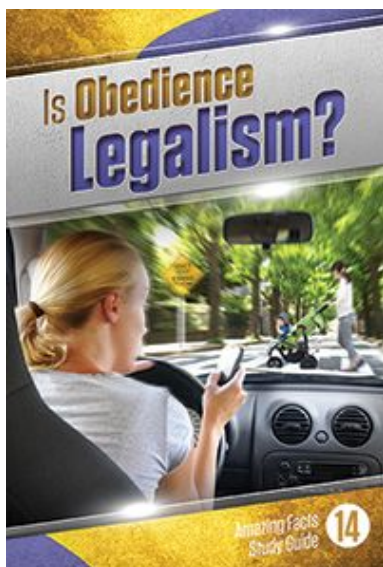


# Is Obedience Legalism



## Lesson 14

People often feel it is okay to violate a minor traffic law or two or perhaps to cheat “a little bit” on their taxes, but God and His laws work much differently. God sees everything we do, hears everything we say, and He really does care about how we treat His law. While the Lord offers forgiveness for our sins, it doesn’t mean there aren’t consequences for breaking God’s law. Amazingly, some Christians say that any attempt to obey God’s law amounts to legalism. Yet Jesus said if you really love God, you’ll do what He asks. So, is obedience really legalism? Take time to read

this Study Guide carefully. Eternal consequences are at stake!

### 1. Does God really see and take note of you personally?

“You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees” (Genesis 16:13).

“O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. You... are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether” (Psalm 139:1–4).

“The very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Luke 12:7).



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**Answer:** Yes. God knows you and every person on earth better than we know ourselves. He takes a personal interest in every human being and sees all that we do. Not one word, thought, or deed is hidden from Him.



Search the Bible for God's will. It is your only safety.

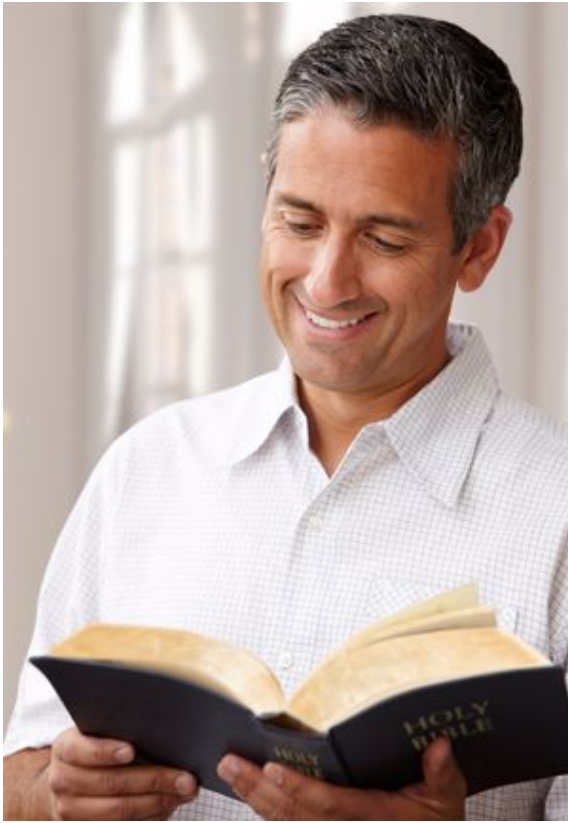
## 2. Can anyone be saved in His kingdom without obeying His Word?

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

“He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9).

**Answer:** No. Scripture is very clear on this. Salvation and the kingdom of heaven are for those who obey the Lord’s commands. God does not promise eternal life to those who merely make a profession of faith or are church members or are baptized, but rather to those who do His will, which is revealed in Scripture. Of course, this obedience is possible only through Christ (Acts 4:12).



### 3. Why does God require



### obedience? Why is it necessary?

“Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14).

“He who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:36).

“The LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive” (Deuteronomy 6:24).

**Answer:** Because only one path leads to God’s kingdom. All roads do not lead to the same place. The Bible is the map—a guidebook with all the instructions, warnings, and information on how to safely reach that kingdom. To disregard any of it leads us away from God and His kingdom. The universe of God is one of law and order—including natural, moral, and spiritual. Breaking any of these laws has fixed consequences. If the Bible had not been given, people would have sooner or later discovered, by trial and error, that the great principles of the Bible exist and are true. When ignored, they result in sickness, torment, and unhappiness of every kind. Thus, the words of the Bible are not merely advice that we can accept or ignore without consequences. The Bible even tells what these consequences are and explains how to avoid them. A person cannot live any way he wishes and still become Christlike—any more than a builder can ignore the blueprints for a house without running into trouble. This is why

God wants you to follow the blueprint of Holy Scripture. There is no other way to become like Him and, thus, be fitted for a place in His kingdom. There is simply no other way to true happiness.

#### 4. Why does God permit disobedience to continue? Why not destroy sin and sinners now?

“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 1:14, 15).

“As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Romans 14:11).

**Answer:** God will not destroy sin until everyone has been fully convinced of His justice, love, and mercy. All will finally realize that God, by asking for obedience, is not trying to force His will upon us, but rather is trying to keep us from hurting and destroying ourselves. The problem of sin is not settled until even the most cynical, hardened sinners are convinced of God’s love and confess that He is just. It will take, perhaps, a major catastrophe to convince some, but the horrible results of sinful living will finally convince all that God is just and right.



All who choose not to follow Christ will finally be destroyed with the sin they love

## 5. Will the disobedient actually be destroyed?

“God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

“All the wicked He will destroy” (Psalm 145:20).

“In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

**Answer:** Yes. The disobedient, including the devil and his angels, will all be destroyed. This being true, surely it is time to abandon all fuzziness regarding what is right or wrong. It is not safe for us to depend on our own notions and feelings of right and wrong. Our only safety is depending on God’s Word. (See Study Guide 11 for details on the destruction of sin and Study Guide 8 on Jesus’ second coming.)



## 6. You want to please God, but is it really possible to keep all of His commandments?

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find” (Matthew 7:7).

“Be diligent [study] to present yourself approved to God ... rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Timothy2:15).

“If any one wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God”(John 7:17).

“Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you”(John 12:35).“As soon as they hear of me they obey me” (Psalm 18:44).

**Answer:** God promises to keep you from error and lead you safely to all truth if you will (1) pray earnestly for guidance, (2) sincerely study God’s Word, and (3) follow truth as soon as you are shown.

## 7. Does God count people guilty for disobeying Bible truth that has never been made clear to them?

“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains” (John 9:41).

“To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you” (Hosea 4:6).

“Seek, and you will find” (Matthew 7:7).



**Answer:** If you have had no opportunity to learn a certain Bible truth, God does not hold you accountable for it. The Bible teaches that you are responsible to God for the light (knowledge of right) you have. But don't be careless with His mercy! Some refuse or neglect to study, seek, learn, and listen and they will be destroyed because they have “rejected knowledge.” To play the ostrich in these crucial matters is fatal. It is our responsibility to search diligently for truth.



## 8. But God isn't particular about obedience on every detail, is He?

“Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt ... shall see the land ... because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb ... and Joshua ... for they have wholly

followed the LORD” (Numbers 32:11,12).

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).

**Answer:** Indeed—He is particular. God's people in Old Testament times learned this the hard way. Those who left Egypt for the Promised Land were a multitude in number. Of this group, only two,

Caleb and Joshua, fully followed the Lord, and they alone entered Canaan. The others died in the wilderness. Jesus said we are to live by “every word” of the Bible. There is not one commandment too many or one commandment too few. They are all important!

**9. When a person discovers new truth, shouldn't he or she wait until all obstacles are removed before embracing it?**

“Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you” (John 12:35).

“I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments” (Psalm 119:60).

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).



**Answer:** No. Once you are clear on a Bible truth, it is never good to wait. Procrastination is a dangerous trap. It seems so harmless to wait, but the Bible teaches that unless a person acts immediately upon light, it quickly turns to darkness. Obstacles to obedience are not removed while we stand and wait; instead, they usually increase in size. Man says to God, “Open up the way, and I’ll go forward.” But God’s way is just the opposite. He says, “You go forward, and I will open up the way.”

**10. But isn't complete obedience an impossibility for a human being?**

“With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

“Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in



Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land” (Isaiah 1:19).

**Answer:** None of us can obey in our own power, but through Christ we can and must. Satan, in order to make God’s requests appear unreasonable, invented the falsehood that obedience is impossible.

### 11. What

#### will happen to a person who willfully continues in disobedience?

“If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:26, 27).

“Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going” (John 12:35).

**Answer:** The Bible leaves no room for doubt. The answer is sobering, but true. When a person knowingly rejects light and continues in disobedience, the light eventually goes out, and he is left in total darkness. A person who rejects truth receives a “strong delusion” to believe that falsehood is truth (2 Thessalonians 2:11). When this happens, he is lost.







## 12. Isn't love more important than obedience?

“Jesus answered ... ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word ... He who does not love Me does not keep My words’ ”(John 14:23, 24).

“This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

**Answer:** Not at all! The Bible actually teaches that true love to God doesn't really exist without obedience. Nor can a person be truly obedient without a love and appreciation for God. No child will fully obey his parents unless he loves them, nor will he show love to his parents if he does not obey. True love and obedience are like conjoined twins. When separated, they die.

## 13. But doesn't true freedom in Christ actually release us from obedience?

“If you abide in My word ... you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. ... Who ever commits sin is a slave of sin”(John 8:31,32,34).

“God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17,18).

“So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts”(Psalm 119:44,45).

**Answer:** No. True freedom means freedom “from sin” (Romans 6:18), or disobedience, which is breaking God's law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, true freedom comes only from obedience. The citizens who obey the law have freedom. The disobedient are caught and lose their freedom. Freedom without obedience is a false freedom—it leads to confusion and anarchy. True Christian freedom means



freedom from disobedience. Disobedience always hurts a person and leads one into the cruel slavery of the devil.



**14. When I believe God requires a certain thing, should I obey even though I do not understand why He requires it?**

“Please, obey the voice of the LORD. ... So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live” (Jeremiah 38:20).

“He who trusts in his own heart is a fool”(Proverbs 28:26).

“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8).

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

“How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD?’ ” (Romans 11:33, 34).

“I will lead them in paths they have not known” (Isaiah 42:16).

“You will show me the path of life” (Psalm 16:11).

**Answer:** Most assuredly! We must give God credit for being wise enough to require some things of us that we might not understand. Good children obey their parents even when the reasons for their commands are not clear. Simple faith and trust in God will cause us to believe that He knows what is best for us and that He will never lead us down a wrong path. It is folly for us, in our ignorance, to distrust God’s leadership even when we don’t fully understand all His reasons.

**15. Who is really behind all disobedience, and why?**

“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. ... In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest:Whoever does not

practice righteousness is not of God” (1 John 3:8, 10).

“Satan ... deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

**Answer:** The devil is responsible. He knows that all disobedience is sin and that sin brings unhappiness, tragedy, alienation from God, and eventual destruction. In his hatred, he tries to lead every person into disobedience. You are involved. You must face the facts and make a decision. Disobey and be lost, or accept Christ and obey and be saved. Your decision regarding obedience is a decision regarding Christ. You cannot separate Him from truth, because He says, “I am ... the truth” (John 14:6).

“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).



The devil wants you to disobey God because he hates you and wants you to be lost.



## 16. What glorious miracle does the Bible promise for God’s children?

“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

**Answer:** Praise God! He promises that just as He worked a miracle to bring us the new birth, He will also continue to work needed miracles in our lives (as we gladly follow Him) until we are safe in His kingdom.

**17. Do you want to begin lovingly obeying and following Jesus fully today?**

**Answer:**



**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

**1. Will any be lost who think they are saved?**

Yes! Matthew 7:21–23 makes it clear that many who prophesy, cast out devils, and do other wonderful works in Christ’s name will be lost. Christ said they are lost because they did not do “the will of My Father in heaven” (verse 21). Those who refuse to obey God will end up believing a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12) and, thus, think they are saved when instead they are lost.

**2. What will happen to sincere people who truly think they are right when they are wrong?**

Jesus said that He will call them to His true way, and His true sheep will hear and follow (John 10:16, 27).

**3. Aren’t sincerity and zeal enough?**

No! We must also be right. The apostle Paul was sincere and zealous when he persecuted Christians before his conversion, but he was also wrong (Acts 22:3, 4; 26:9–11).

**4. What will happen to people who haven’t received light?**

The Bible says that all have received some light. “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9). Each person will be judged according to how he or she follows available light. Even unbelievers have some light and follow the law, according to Romans 2:14, 15.

**5. Is it safe for a person to first ask God for a sign to confirm He wants obedience?**

It is not. Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign” (Matthew 12:39). People who won’t accept the plain teachings of the Bible would not be convinced by a sign either. As Jesus said, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

**6. Hebrews 10:26, 27 seems to indicate that if a person willfully commits just one sin after he knows better, he is lost. Is this correct?**

No. Anyone can confess such a sin and be forgiven. The Bible is speaking here not of one single act of sin—but of a presumptuous continuation in sin and a refusal to surrender to Christ after one knows better. Such action grieves away the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and hardens a person's heart until one is "past feeling" (Ephesians 4:19) and lost. The Bible says, "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression" (Psalm 19:13).

## **QUIZ QUESTIONS**

### **1. People will be saved who (1)**

- Cast out devils in Christ's name.
- Claim to love Christ.
- Accept and obey the Lord.

### **2. What three things listed below will assure me of receiving full truth? (3)**

- Ask my psychiatrist.
- Pray for light.
- Do what my minister says.
- Give liberal offerings at church.
- Punish myself.
- Receive a better education.
- Ask God for a sign.
- Study the Bible.
- Follow the truth that I now understand.

### **3. God holds me accountable for (1)**

- Doing what my minister suggests.
- Following in my parents' footsteps.
- The light that I have and can have.

**4. When I discover new truth, I should (1)**

- Ignore it.
- Wait until I feel impressed to accept it.
- Accept and obey it at once.

**5. Full obedience to the Lord's commandments is (1)**

- Not possible under any circumstances.
- Legalism and of the devil.
- Possible only through Christ.

**6. Willful disobedience (1)**

- Leads to darkness and eternal destruction.
- Is okay for zealous church workers.
- Is overlooked by God if I am stubborn.

**7. Genuine love for the Lord (1)**

- Is better than obedience.
- Makes obedience unnecessary.
- Causes me to obey Him happily.

**8. True Christian freedom means (1)**

- The right to do as I please in everything.
- The right to disobey God.
- Freedom from disobedience and slavery to the devil.

**9. When a point of truth becomes clear but I do not understand why God requires me to obey it, I should (1)**

- Wait until the reason becomes clear.
- Reject that point of truth.
- Accept it and obey God's Word.

**10. Who is really responsible for all disobedience? (1)**

- The government.

\_\_\_\_\_ My parents, who trained me wrong.

\_\_\_\_\_ The devil.

### **11. Why is obedience necessary? (1)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Because God is bigger than I am, and I am afraid of Him.

\_\_\_\_\_ To keep God from getting angry.

\_\_\_\_\_ Because I love God and want to follow His rules for Christian behavior.

### **12. Why doesn't God destroy the disobedient right now? (1)**

\_\_\_\_\_ He is afraid to.

\_\_\_\_\_ He enjoys watching wickedness develop.

\_\_\_\_\_ He is waiting until all are fully convinced of His love and justice.

### **13. Does it bring you joy to know that Jesus not only provides the new birth to those who accept and follow Him, but that He also continues to work needed miracles in their lives until they are safe in His kingdom?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes.

\_\_\_\_\_ No.

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