**[Is the gospel believed or obeyed?](https://michaelfbird.substack.com/p/is-the-gospel-believed-or-obeyed?r=45809&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web)**

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Is the gospel what we are called to believe or how we are called to live?

In Reformed theology, there is a distinction commonly made between law and grace which is programmatic for envisaging how the biblical covenants relate to each other and the meaning of sanctification. Now, this distinction is attempting to do a good thing, namely, to ensure that the gospel is about divine initiative and action and not about our accumulation of merit or works that might attempt to earn salvation. BUT the danger is that this bifurcation results in a separation of salvation as both gift and demand, as indicative and imperative, as faith that issues forth in good works, it cuts the chords between faith and obedience, partitions justification from sanctification, and posits ruptures in salvation history that does not exist (i.e., the Abrahamic covenant is about grace while the Mosaic covenant is about works).

It helps if we remember that the gospel is not just believed but obeyed. Because the gospel is - in Wrightonian, McKnightian, and Batian idiom - a summons to allegiance in King Jesus.

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First, Paul refers to a day when “according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:16). So the gospel is not merely the offer of salvation, it is also a declaration that Jesus is the appointed Judge.

Second, we hear that unbelievers are held accountable for not obeying the gospel. In explaining Israel’s current unbelief in the Messiah, Paul says: “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'” (Rom 10:16). Paul tells the Thessalonians about the future day when: “The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess 1:7-8).  And in 1 Peter we are similarly told, “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet 4:17). It could be possible that the word “obey” is used synonymously with “faith” since there is a shared overlap in *pistis*and *akouō* in terms of semantic domains. However, the impression I get in these texts is that the gospel is something that persons do not just believe or assent to, but something they are meant to become loyal to and submit to.

Third, Paul also argues that the gospel is something we live out, we live a life according to the gospel, in conformity to the gospel, worthy of the gospel. Paul told the Philippians: “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27). The gospel is genuinely “lived” as a pattern of life for those who follow King Jesus.

Texts like these demonstrate that the gospel is an offer of salvation, but it is also a royal summons to come under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The royal announcement is that Jesus is the King who offers deliverance to all who cling to him and he is the judge of those who would resist and resent the reign of God. So while a Law and Gospel antithesis is not invalid, nonetheless, its concerns need to be met without narrowing the biblical presentation of the gospel which does warn of judgment as well as call people to obey its pronouncement about the person and work of Christ.