

# *The Life of the Christian in the Life of Jesus*

by Chris Yokel

The life of Jesus is an interesting problem for the Christian. I'm not talking about the circumstances of the Second Person of the Trinity taking on human flesh and dwelling among us as the God-Man for 33 odd years, though many have pondered its mystery. I'm talking about how we relate to the whole mess of everything Jesus said and did as He walked on this earth. We often focus on the beginning and end of Jesus' life. His birth was important because it ushered in the mystery of the Incarnation, and it heralded the coming of salvation. His suffering, death, and resurrection form the central pillars of that salvation, so we rightly focus on them as well. But what about all the in-between stuff? What about the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, the healings, all of that? Here is where Christians fall into different camps.

## **Crossing Every "T"...Or Not**

The camp of Reformed theology tends to emphasize two things in regards to Jesus' life and ministry: that Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the Mosaic law on our behalf, and that in His earthly life Jesus functioned in the threefold role of priest, prophet, and king, taking on the ancient offices of Israel. Of the two, the most critical point for Reformed thinking is that Jesus performed perfect obedience to the law. This is what is referred to as Christ's active obedience. As Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof explains it, "His active obedience consists in all that He did to observe the law in behalf of sinners, as a condition for obtaining eternal life...through His active obedience He merited eternal life for the sinner, bringing Him to the goal which Adam failed to reach."<sup>1</sup> The godfather of Reformed theology, John Calvin, considers this one of the essential points of Jesus' earthly existence: "Another principal part of our reconciliation with God was that man, who had lost himself by his disobedience, should by way of remedy, oppose to it obedience, satisfy the justice of God, and pay the penalty of sin. Therefore, our Lord came forth very man, adopted the person of Adam, and assumed his name, that he might in his stead obey the Father"<sup>2</sup>

Both of these statements assume the traditional Reformed understanding of covenants, which includes the concept of a covenant of works that God had with Adam. I have argued elsewhere about the flaws in this system<sup>3</sup>, but in brief, the Reformed covenantal understanding is this: When Adam was created, he was placed in a probationary state with God. In order to attain the perfection of eternal life, he needed to obey God perfectly. That is, he had to merit life by obedience. He failed in this. When God called Abraham, he began to introduce the idea of a covenant based on faith and His own unconditional promise. But, when Israel was formed as a nation under Moses, he preserved the people of promise provisionally with the law<sup>4</sup>, which was a republication of the covenant of works, meant to show Israel how miserably short they fell of God's holiness. Theoretically, one could still obtain salvation through perfect obedience, but no one could perform it. When Christ came into the world, He was perfectly obedient to the law, and thus by His obedience He merited (as Berkhof himself says) eternal life and righteousness. When we now come to Christ in faith, not only is His sacrificial death on the cross counted towards us, but His active obedience is counted, or imputed, to us as well, so that we are considered by God as having kept the law perfectly.

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1 Louis Berkhof. *Manual of Christian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 215-16.

2 John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 402.

3 See "A Tale of Two Covenant Systems," <http://covenantofchrist.org/ministry/media/articles/A%20Tale%20of%20Two%20Covenant%20Systems.pdf>

4 From here on out, by law I mean the Mosaic law.

There's two problems with this view. One, as I have argued in my other article, is that I don't think the covenant of works scheme exists in the Bible. The other is that Jesus didn't obey the law.

That probably sounds shocking and downright heretical, so let me clarify. Jesus lived a sinless life, but He did not obey the law perfectly. In fact, it might even be argued that He broke it in several cases. For instance, Jesus touched dead people (Matthew 9:25; Luke 7:14), lepers (Mark 1:40-42), and was touched by an unclean woman (Matthew 9:20-21) without then undergoing the purification that the law required (Leviticus 15:25-27; Numbers 19:11-13). God considered such contact with unclean persons or things as defilement, and anyone who became unclean by such contact would then be a defilement to the temple (Leviticus 15:31). In fact, God says in the law, "Whoever touches a dead person, the body of anyone who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from Israel" (Numbers 19:11).

It may also be argued that Jesus broke the commandments of the Mosaic law when He offered forgiveness to people directly, without temple sacrifice and the ministrations of the priesthood. The law is *very* specific about what sacrifices were required for different sins and transgressions. No one was to be forgiven apart from animal sacrifice by the priests. But Jesus forgives all kinds of people without telling them to go make a sacrifice. Contrast this to the incident in Luke 5:12-16 where, after having healed a leper, He instructs him to "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." Jesus seems to pick and choose His own applications of the law. Is this the behavior of a man concerned with absolutely strict law-keeping in order to meet God's perfect standard of holiness?

In other instances, Jesus places Himself *above* the law. This happens in the instances of forgiveness, when the Pharisees say that only God can forgive sins, and Jesus in a roundabout way agrees with them, claiming divinity. In Luke 6:1-5, when the Pharisees accuse Jesus and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath after they are seen picking grain, Jesus simply says, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." In other words, He is above it.

In John 8, when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of bearing unlawful witness to Himself, Jesus acknowledges their point and then brushes it aside: "In your Law it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." No Israelite under the Mosaic law could bear witness on his own behalf, so once again, Jesus is placing Himself above the law. It is even interesting that He uses the phrase "*your* Law," almost as if it has no bearing on Him.

Jesus most supremely demonstrates that He is above the law when he simply overturns it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes two, possibly three provisions of the law regarding retaliation (Matthew 5:38), divorce (5:31), and enemies (5:43) and establishes something else in their place.

These examples make it hard to accept the Reformed understanding that Jesus' life was dedicated to strict law-keeping, in order to merit the covenantal blessings of righteousness and eternal life.

## **Miracle Man**

Let's turn to another perspective on Jesus' life and ministry, and that is a particularly strong strain of the charismatic perspective. These charismatics tend to focus on the miracle-working aspects of Christ's ministry. In this light, Jesus demonstrated a power that we should be emulating as His followers. We should be casting out demons, healing people, and walking in other such

manifestations of the Spirit. They take passages such as Mark 16:17-18<sup>5</sup> and John 14:12<sup>6</sup> as authority for modern Christians to be able to expect to walk in the same healing power of Jesus.

There are a few basic rebuttals that can be forwarded here to start off. If we take John 14:12 and accept the particular charismatic interpretation, then we have to ask, what are these works we will do that are “greater” than what Jesus did? I think theologian Thomas Schreiner is absolutely correct when he observes, “The 'greater works' cannot refer to signs and wonders that are greater in quality than those done by Jesus because no believer ever has or ever will do greater miracles than Jesus. He raised the dead, opened the eyes of the blind, restored hearing to the deaf, cast out demons, healed the lame, calmed a stormy sea, etc. No miracle-worker has even come close since the days of the apostles, and even the apostles did not do any signs and wonders that were greater.”<sup>7</sup>

Schreiner goes on to effectively point out that John distinguishes between the word “sign,” which is used more specifically to describe miracles, and “works,” which is more broadly used to describe things like faith (6:28-29), and walking in the footsteps of Abraham (8:39).

Concerning Mark 16:17-18, it can be pointed out that in regards to the larger passage in question there is some dispute as to its authenticity. As early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., church fathers like Eusebius and Jerome pointed out that the earliest Greek manuscripts they had did not contain Mark 16:9-20. Some modern translations carry it and some do not. However, even if we set the issue of authenticity aside, we can tackle the logic of the passage itself. In it, Jesus says that the signs spoken of (immunity to snake bites and poison, ability to heal the sick, cast out demons, and speak in tongues) “will accompany those who believe.” We would have to assume from this that every Christian who has ever existed has been in possession of these powers, since Christians are those who “believe.” Yet it only takes looking at something like the history of the infamous “snake-handling” tradition among certain Christian churches in rural Kentucky and Tennessee to know that many people who have tried such a thing in Jesus' name were bitten and died.<sup>8</sup> Did God fail on His promise? Now it could be argued that such people were deliberately putting God to the test, something that is forbidden, and that there is an actual incident in Scripture where Paul was bitten by a snake and survived (Acts 28:3-6). It could be pointed out in return, that this is the *only* recorded instance of such a thing happening anywhere in the New Testament, which would seem strange if these abilities are ubiquitous.

These examples seem to point away from interpreting the passage as granting some kind of universal immunity to all Christians from snake bites and poison. Now, many charismatic Christian would likely agree with me on these two issues. *However*, the passage also says that among the signs will be the ability to cast out demons, speak in tongues, and heal the sick. If charismatics would agree that immunity from snake bites and poison are not a universal reality for all Christians, what about the universality of these *other* signs? Many charismatics would be less willing to deny the continuance of these gifts, in fact, this is where they stake their ground, especially the manifestation of tongues.

My purpose here is not to launch an entire treatise on some form of the cessationist position when it comes to the gifts, so I will try to summarize some basic points of my own argument when it comes to, once again, looking at Jesus' ministry and how it relates to us. When examining the New Testament, it appears that signs and wonders fulfill a pretty focused task, which is giving

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5 “And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

6 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”

7 Thomas Schreiner, “The Greater Works in John 14:12”. [http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/John14\\_12.pdf](http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/John14_12.pdf)

8 Mike Ford. “Should Christians Handle Snakes?”.

<http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Library.sr/CT/RA/k/831/Should-Christians-Handle-Snakes.htm>

visible manifestation to the spiritual reality that Jesus was bringing about with His ministry. They were also evidence given to demonstrate the legitimacy, majesty, and power of Jesus' ministry, as well as the apostles. For example, when the Pharisees challenged Jesus' authority to forgive the sins of a paralytic, he asked them whether it was easier to forgive the man or tell him to rise and walk. Then he said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," and commands the paralytic to rise and walk. He specifically points to the sign of healing as an evidence for His greater, unseen, spiritual authority to forgive sins. Even the term "sign" which is used so frequently in John, and also in the other Gospels to speak of Jesus' miracles, highlights the referential nature of the miracles themselves. They were not merely some kind of spiritual hocus-pocus meant to dazzle people. They were pointing to something greater—the manifestation of a new creation yet to come, the omnipotence present in the person of Jesus, the evidence proving that the words of Jesus were true. The miracles that Jesus performed in His ministry, and which the apostles did later, are miracles that just do not show up all over the Bible. It is also worth noting that if one looks at the larger context of Scripture, miracles and other supernatural manifestations are not something we see average Christians regularly performing. They are usually signs that accompanied ministers or prophets of God to, once again, demonstrate that they came in His name.

In all this I am not saying that miracles *cannot* occur today, or that God cannot use individual Christians to perform miraculous signs. It just appears from the larger examination of the purpose of such signs, and the evidence of the New Testament, that such signs are no longer normative like they were in Jesus' ministry, and that of the apostles. So, looking at Jesus' ministry as a prototype for how Christians should walk out their lives is an overemphasis in the wrong direction.

So then, how *should* we look at the ministry life of Jesus?

## **My Servant, Israel**

Isaiah 42 begins this way:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my Spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
He will not grow faint or be discouraged  
till he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his law.

Thus says God, the Lord,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people on it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:  
"I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;  
I will take you by the hand and keep you;  
I will give you as a covenant for the people,  
a light for the nations,  
to open the eyes that are blind,  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,

from the prison those who sit in darkness.  
I am the Lord; that is my name;  
my glory I give to no other,  
nor my praise to carved idols.  
Behold, the former things have come to pass,  
and new things I now declare;  
before they spring forth  
I tell you of them” (vv. 1-9)

Most Christians reading this today would naturally conclude that the “servant” being referred to is Jesus, and they would not be wrong to do so. However, greater context reveals that this cannot only refer to Jesus. For example, we immediately run into a problem with verse 19 of the same chapter if we take that tack. It says: “Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the Lord?” Is God saying that Jesus is blind and deaf? That certainly doesn't make sense. Looking at a little more of the larger context reveals that there is another entity that is also referred to as God's servant—the nation of Israel. In Isaiah 43 God says to the nation: “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he’” (v. 10). And further on, in Isaiah 49, it is as if Jesus and the nation of Israel speak with the same voice: “And he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified’” (v. 3). Several other places in Isaiah confirm this designation of Israel as God's servant (41:8-9; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4).

Looking at Isaiah 42 again with this perspective, we can see how the ministries that Israel and Jesus were called to intersect. That is, in Isaiah 42, God is calling Jesus as the Servant to do everything that Israel itself was called to do and failed to do. They were called to show forth justice in the earth, to be a covenant for the peoples, and a light to the nations. Consider Deuteronomy 4:5-8:

See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

If we think back even further in covenantal history, Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, was promised by God that through him “all the families of the earth [would] be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). So right from the start, Israel was a nation whose calling had an outward-looking component to it. They were God's chosen vehicle through which He would work His salvation and show His glory to the whole earth. But they of course failed miserably in this task, as the book of Isaiah itself attests. The kingdom was destroyed because of Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness, and the nation was sent into exile. Even in Jesus' day, there was still a sense that Israel was in exile. They were in their own land, but lived under the boot of Rome. They were waiting for the Messiah to come free them from physical tyranny.

Jesus came into this world as a Jew. Sometimes we forget that. We often look at him as some sort of ahistorical figure who just happened to pop up in the Middle East 2,000 years ago. But (law-keeping discussion aside), Jesus was thoroughly Jewish, had a Jewish mindset, and like all His Jewish brethren, had inherited the long history of God's covenant promises with Israel. He grew up attending the religious feasts with His parents, worshiping in the synagogue and temple, learning the Old Testament, singing the Psalms, and hearing about Israel's long held hope for the Messiah. When did He come to realize that He was this Messiah? When did He come to realize that He was

the Son of God, and what's more, God Himself?

I don't think it's reasonable to assume that Jesus popped out of the womb with a fully developed understanding of Himself as the Second Person of the Trinity. Luke records twice in his Gospel details that appear to describe a normal human maturing process when he says in 2:40 that the child Jesus “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him,” and later on in that chapter “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (v. 52). That Jesus experienced human limitations is also evident in the fact that He said He did not know the hour of His Second Coming (Matthew 24:36) and He also expresses the ability to marvel at the faith of the Roman centurion (Matthew 7:10), an act unusual to someone who would possess total omniscience. How this works with the fact that Jesus was also fully divine is the mystery of the God-Man.

Taking all of this into consideration however, it seems reasonable to assume that Jesus grew and developed gradually like all of us, and that as He studied the Scriptures, He came to the realization that *He* was the Servant of God from Isaiah, that *He* was the Messiah, and that it would be *His* vocation to take on this role, and as one man to step into the shoes of Israel. As renowned New Testament scholar N.T. Wright has observed:

Plenty of other Jews of Jesus' day studied the scriptures with care, insight, and attention. There is every reason to suppose that Jesus did the same, and that he allowed this study to shape his sense of what he had to do. His task, he believed, was to bring the great story of Israel to its decisive climax. The long-range plan of God the creator—to rescue the world from evil and to put everything to rights at last—was going to come true in him.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus saw it as His mission from the Father to take on the vocation that Israel had failed in. When He read Isaiah 42, He saw Himself as the Servant. He would be the one to bring forth justice to the nations, to be a light to the world, to be a covenant for the peoples, to open blind eyes and release prisoners. And this He did. He brought the light of God's truth into the world, to Jews and Gentiles, showing them a new way to live, in a new creation, under the gracious rule of the King of Kings. He declared, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). He made a new covenant with His disciples that they would then share with the world, and He sealed it in His own blood. He opened the eyes of the blind and released prisoners as a sign of new creation which was beginning to take over the world, a creation in which God's truth, justice, and beauty would reign, and sin and death would be cast out. Yeshua (Joshua) Messiah, the Seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), became the New Adam (Romans 5:12-21), and embodied within Himself the beginning of the New Israel, the Spirit-birthed new creation.

How does this relate to us? Well, in coming to Christ we take on His identity and His vocation, though in a slightly different way—none of us will carry His atoning cross, although we indeed carry crosses. But the fact remains that Christ passes His vocation on to us. As He was the light of the world, so He says to us in Matthew 5:14-16, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” And just as Israel was called to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), so we who follow Christ are called by Peter “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). We are now given the mission of proclaiming the excellencies of our risen High Priest and King, of spreading His rule throughout the earth, and living out the new creation, just as He Himself did when He was on this earth.

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9 N.T. Wright. *Simply Christian*. San Francisco: Harper, p. 108.

This will not be easy. Jesus was killed by those who hated His work and everything He stood before. Many will not bow their knee to Christ the King. Satan certainly does not want to lose his precious foothold in the world, and thus seeks our destruction tooth and nail. Jesus told His apostles right before His death: “A servant is no greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). He also promised, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). How are we to overcome such things? Once again, we must look to the example of Christ. Like Him, we must keep the covenant of our God by faith in His promises.

## Jesus, Man of Faith

It seems a rather unusual concept these days to talk about Jesus having faith. “Why would He need faith?” we might ask, “Wasn't He God? Didn't He know everything? Why would there be a need for faith if He knew everything?” Good questions, but as I have already pointed out, there were certain things that Jesus professed to not know, or acted as if He did not know. He submitted Himself to a limited human consciousness, with what seems to be moments of divine knowledge here and there.

The writer of Hebrews says some further interesting things about Jesus. In chapter 2 of the epistle, the writer says that, “It was fitting that he [God the Father], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering” (2:10). Jesus made perfect through suffering? What does that mean? Wasn't he already perfect? The writer reiterates the idea in 5:8-9, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.” Again, what does it mean that Jesus was made perfect, or that He learned obedience?

The writer of Hebrews is not implying in any way that Jesus was somehow less than obedient before completing His earthly mission. The root of the word “perfect” in both passages is *teleioó* (τελειόω), which means “to consummate” or “to bring to completion or fulfillment.” It speaks of an end-goal. While it does not imply sinful imperfection in Christ, it does speak of a way in which He was not yet perfect *for His role as Mediator and high priest*. As the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus never experienced suffering, or pain, or sin as humans experience it, and He never had to exercise faith in His Father. This made Him insufficient as a high priest. This is the implied condition in the statements surrounding Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8-9. “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (2:17-18). “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (4:15).

I would argue that this meant, while on earth, Jesus had to learn to exercise covenant faithfulness towards God. Just as Adam was called to persevere in sinlessness and obedience, so also Jesus was called to persevere in sinlessness and obedience. And just as Satan came to tempt Adam, which He was successful in doing, so he came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. But in response to Satan's temptations, Jesus quoted God's covenant words from the Old Testament back at him.<sup>10</sup> In doing so, Jesus placed Himself within the covenant—which means He knew that if He was unfaithful to God, He would be cursed. I know that here lies dangerous ground. To suggest that it was possible for Jesus to sin appears sacrilegious. Rev. Richard D. Phillips strikes a good balance in trying to explain how this was possible:

In one vital sense, Jesus was capable of sinning because he had all the equipment necessary for sin. He had a mouth and a tongue, and so he could lie. He had arms and hands, and so he could murder. To plow a bit deeper, he had a human nature, he had a

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<sup>10</sup> Jesus' replies are from Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13, and 6:16.

heart and a mind, and so he was fully capable of envy or greed or lust. There was no physical barrier or liability in his nature that prevented Jesus from sinning. He was fully capable of committing every sin in the book. Furthermore, the Scripture makes it plain that Jesus was genuinely tempted to sin. Hebrews 4:15 states this unequivocally, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”* So when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, these were real temptations. He was really hungry and so Satan’s suggestion to use his power illegitimately really tempted him. So also for the other temptations, and every sort of temptation we can be exposed to. Jesus not only was tempted, but he was tempted more deeply than any of us could ever be, because long after we would have given in to temptation he did not yield but continued to feel its torment. This may lead you to wonder if I am suggesting that Jesus had a fully human nature. That is exactly what I am asserting. Jesus was fully human. He was not a fake. In his humanity, Jesus was just like everybody else, just like you and me, with one difference: our humanity is corrupted by sin; his humanity is perfect in holiness. As a man, Jesus was fully subject to the capacity to sin, and the temptation to sin, and the torment of resisting those temptations, but he was sustained and empowered by his divine nature. Because of his divine and holy nature, Jesus did not sin although sin was a course of action fully open to him.<sup>11</sup>

Having submitted Himself to a limited human consciousness, Jesus would have had to withstand these temptations in the way that all believers through history have had to withstand temptation—by faith. He had to trust in His Father’s promises to Him, promises of exaltation, promises of a throne and a kingdom, promises of resurrection, which He no doubt found in Scripture and adopted as He came into His own self-knowledge as the Messiah. He also knew that all these promises would only come to Him if He was faithful to the mission given to Him by the Father. I think this is why we find such a Father-ward focus in Jesus’ life, especially in the gospel of John. He grounded His confidence in the Father’s faithfulness in His own obedience: *“And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him”* (John 8:29, emphasis mine). In John 17, in Jesus’ famous “high priestly prayer,” He reminds the Father of all the ways that He has walked in faithfulness, and reminds the Father of His own promises (vv. 4-5). Unlike Adam, and unlike Israel, Jesus did keep covenant with God. As Hebrews again testifies, *“[Jesus] was faithful to him who appointed him....Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son”* (3:2,6).

As pointed out earlier, this obedience was not directed toward the law, so that Jesus could cash in on some merit-based system that had been lying in wait since the time of Adam. Jesus did not obey *for us* so that we would not have to obey. He obeyed for us in that He became the perfect sacrifice to free us from the bondage of sin, and thus enabled us to obey God’s commands by the power of the Spirit. And—this is the point I have been driving at—He obeyed to be an example for us, in how we should walk before God in covenant faithfulness. This is what Paul is driving at in Philippians 2, when he encourages us to have the same humble mind as Christ. This is what the writer of Hebrews is driving at in Hebrews 12, where at the culmination of his litany of faithful saints from the past, he says, *“Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which cling so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted”* (12:1-3).

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11 Richard D. Phillips. “Was Jesus Capable Of Sinning?” <http://thoughtsactions.wordpress.com/2007/10/29/was-jesus-capable-of-sinning/>.



## **Following Jesus**

The apostle John wrote in his first epistle, “By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (2:5-6). Jesus was an example for us in the way that He lived His life. He did not walk faithfully before God so that we don't have to. Nor should we expect to walk in the same miracle-working power that He did. Even though we will never be sinless like He was, He wants us to walk faithfully like He did, trusting in the promises of the Father and obeying. And we can, because the Spirit that was in Christ is now in us, making us the new creation, the new children of Abraham, the new Israel.