

**Commands
in the
New Covenant**

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The words that were previously impossible external commands from the physical mouth of Jesus now became internal commands written on their hearts. These commands became their new nature.

Conclusion

Many of us were taught that we should base our lives on the Bible. We should obey its commands and we could claim its promises.

We should memorise its verses according to the words of Ps 119:11 “**I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you**”.

These instructions were good and brought blessing, but fundamentally they were the teachings of the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant was a good covenant, but the Jews like all other peoples had sinful hearts and they failed to keep it. God predicted through Jeremiah that he would bring in a New Covenant in which he would write his laws on people’s hearts ([Jer 31:31-33](#)). He would remove their sinful natures and replace them with hearts that would automatically keep his laws.

This he achieved through the death and resurrection of his son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Introduction

When I was a young believer, I was told that the Bible was the Word of God. I should read it as if every word in it was addressed to me personally. “When you pray”, they told me, “you speak to God”. “When you read the Bible”, they said, “God speaks to you”.

The Bible is full of both promises and commands. All the commands were for me to obey, I was told, and all the promises were for me to claim.

The Bible itself appeared to support what they were saying.

Joshua 1:8 says: “**This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.**”

Psalm 1 is similar: “**Blessed is the man ... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.**”

Here, surely, was the recipe for a successful spiritual life.

Some years later, I saw that these instructions to study the Scriptures were both in the Old Testament. Nowhere were there any similar instructions in the New Testament. Never did Peter, Paul, John or indeed Jesus ever instruct anyone to study the Scriptures and obey their commands or claim their promises.

The Old Covenant was based on the Hebrew Scriptures and especially the Law (Torah); the New Covenant was based on the Holy Spirit.

In this writing, I want to consider the commands in the New Covenant. In a separate writing, I hope to write about [Promises in the New Covenant](#).

Commands in the Bible

The Bible contains many commands that God gave to his people. Are all these commands for us also? Many people believe that they are.

Many years ago I read the biography of the great cricketer and pioneer missionary, C.T. Studd. He served the Lord in China, India and Africa and founded the WEC or Worldwide Evangelistic Crusade. When he was young, he read through the Bible underlining every command in red to make sure he had obeyed it. He read the words, “**Sell all you have and give to the poor**” and then gave away his inherited fortune. He came to the words of Jesus, “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature**” and in obedience he went to China as a missionary.

God wonderfully blessed and used C.T. Studd, but should we follow his example of trying to obey all the commands in the Bible?

First, we will consider two commands from the mouth of Jesus.

- “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.**”
- “**Love one another.**”

The “Great Commission”

“**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to (evangelise) every creature**” (Mark 16:15).

This is among the best known commands in the Bible.

In [Matt 28:18-20](#), Jesus told his disciples to “**go and teach all nations**”.

Jesus gave similar commands in [Luke 24:47](#) and [Acts 1:8](#). These commands are collectively known as “The Great Commission”, but this name occurs nowhere in the New Testament.

The Sermon on the Mount

Chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew’s gospel are commonly known as the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Jesus took several difficult instructions from the Old Testament and made them even more difficult!

“**You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**” (Matt 5:43 -44)

“**You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart**” (Matt 5:27-28).

“**You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also**” (Matt 5:38-39).

Did the disciples keep all these instructions? Did Jesus seriously expect that they would? They failed time and again. Why? Because the spirit that was in Jesus was not yet in them.

Other commands were close to impossible!

- “**You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (Matt 5:48). How are we going to do that?
- He said to an impotent man, “**Take up your bed and walk**” ([John 5:8](#)). How could an impotent man do that?
- He told a dead man (Lazarus) to come out of his tomb! How can you expect a dead man to do anything?

Everything changed on the day of Pentecost. The spirit that enabled Jesus to live a perfect life passed into his waiting disciples.

We learn from this that commands from the mouth of Jesus carry with them the power to do what he has commanded.

See also [1Pet 3:8](#), [1John 3:23](#), [1John 4:7](#), [1John 4:11-12](#)

Paul also repeated the command to love several times. See [Rom 12:10](#), [Rom 13:8](#), [Eph 4:2](#).

Peter, Paul and John, in addition to Jesus, all instructed their readers to love one another. But how? I believe this is the most impossible command in the whole Bible! How can we obey it?

Paul tells us the only way: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). He wrote something similar to the Thessalonians: “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another” (1Thess 4:9).

We can only love one another if God has put that love in our hearts.

New Testament Times

In New Testament Times, how many people had copies of the New Testament? Not many! Most of it had not yet been written. Some privileged people got letters from Peter or Paul and the Corinthians and Thessalonians even got two each!

Some Jewish people had scrolls of the Torah in their synagogues and maybe some other Hebrew writings.

Few people had their own copies of the Bible until at least the 19th century and many people do not have Bibles till this day.

How did all these people obey all the commands in the Bible or claim all the promises that God had made to them? Answer: they did not have Bibles on which to base their lives; instead they had to base their lives on Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Surely the “Great Commission” is for all believers?! We must all play our part in preaching the gospel to all the world. We have always been taught that.

But let us look more deeply at this. Jesus gave this command to his 11 remaining disciples. He had spent 3 years training these men to preach the gospel, heal the sick, cast out demons and even raise the dead. They were now fully trained and prepared for the task he was giving them.

But even after all that training he told his disciples to “**stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high**” (Luke 24:49). The disciples could not fulfil his instructions without being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Have all today’s believers in Jesus had 3 years’ training in preaching the gospel, healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead? And have they all been filled with the Holy Spirit? If not, how are they going to fulfil the “Great Commission”? They are simply not qualified for the job!

Did Peter, Paul and James pass on the “Great Commission” to all their readers when they wrote their letters? No such instruction occurs in any of their letters or in the writings of Paul.

Jesus himself spoke about a different “Great Commission” found in Matt 22:38: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment**”.

Paul’s “Missionary” Journeys

Paul was a great New Testament evangelist. Was this because Peter told him about the words of Jesus and the “Great Commission”? Paul actually tells us ([Gal 1:17-18](#)) that he met none of the 11 apostles for 3 years after this conversion, and he then only spent a short time with Peter.

So how and why did Paul set off to evangelise the Roman empire? Read Acts 13:2, “**the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me**

Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them””. Paul’s command to evangelise did not come from the mouth of Jesus or from the Scriptures, but directly from the Holy Spirit through the church.

Paul was clearly well equipped for the tasks of evangelism and teaching both by his knowledge of the Scriptures and by his experience of the Holy Spirit.

One missionary journey was not enough for Paul. How did he receive his command to go on his second missionary journey? *He didn’t!* Turn to Acts 15:36! **‘And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”’**

No mention of a command from God! It was just a thought that came into Paul’s mind!

Was Paul right to set off on this second journey? Shouldn’t he have waited for a clear instruction from the Lord? Or shouldn’t the church have had another word to send him out?

We come to a very important lesson. God’s commands under the New Covenant work in a very different way from under the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant God’s commands were external, coming through Scripture or other people such as prophets. Under the New Covenant God’s commands are internal. He actually puts his commands inside us. He puts the desire to do his will inside us, so that sometimes we don’t even know we are doing his will. We think it is simply our own thoughts. He gives us the **mind of Christ**.

Instead of a command to evangelise, he gave Paul an inward compulsion to preach the gospel. Paul said, **“For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”** (1Cor 9:16).

Evangelism is just one of five ministry gifts named by Paul in Eph 4:7-11. The other four gifts are apostles, prophets, shepherds and teachers. God does not command people to be prophets. Instead of commanding them, he puts prophetic ministries inside them. He does not command people to be shepherds (pastors). He gives them pastoral hearts.

All this is clearly visible in the life of Jesus, who is our role model for the New Covenant. God gave him no external commands. He did everything by the inward leading of the Holy Spirit. Jesus just did whatever he wanted to do. God gave him no instructions. He did not need to. Everything Jesus wanted to do was the will of God.

Paul wrote to Timothy, who was a teacher, and told him that **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”** - see [2Tim 3:15-17](#). This is exactly the way Paul used the Scriptures himself; but he did not tell Timothy to obey scriptural commands or claim scriptural promises.

Love one Another

Jesus repeated this command three times to his disciples:

- **“A new commandment I give you that you love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”** (John 13:34,35).
- **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”** (John 15:12).
- **“These things I command you, so that you will love one another”** (John 15:17).

Peter and John, surprisingly, repeated almost nothing from the teaching of Jesus in the sermon on the mount, but several times they both repeated his command to love:

- **“Love one another earnestly from a pure heart”** (1Pet 1:22).
- **“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another”** (1John 3:11).