



**“Christians
aren’t
perfect,
just
forgiven!”**

The victim of child abuse probably wishes that Christians didn’t brag that they “aren’t perfect, just forgiven.” He or she wishes they would have been perfect at not doing *that* sin that hurt them so much. And the same with those who have been lied to, stolen from, cheated on, or raised in a broken home. Don’t Christians have to be good at all?!

But the Bible doesn't teach that Christians "aren't perfect, just forgiven." In fact, Jesus said, "Be perfect, as your

heavenly Father is perfect," and the apostle Peter wrote, "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also *in all your behavior*." Some Christians are saying that these kinds of commands and teachings from Jesus and His apostles were just to give us something to aim for, but that we were never expected to actually do it. But Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."¹ And the apostle John wrote, "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."²

And what about all of the laws to do with morality given to us in the Old Testament? Wouldn't the world be a lot better place if those who claim to love God would just keep those commands? But some Christians are saying that God never expected us to keep the Law and that it was just given to us to teach us that we can't keep it and so that we would see our need to be forgiven. What kind of being would God have to be to give us a law that we are not capable of keeping, and then condemn us to hell for not keeping it? He would have to be very cruel. Again, the scriptures tell it differently, "This commandment which I command you today [the Ten Commandments] is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach...but the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that *you may observe it*."³

So the Bible teaches that we *can* be obedient, are *expected* to be obedient, and that if we are not, *we do not know God, nor do we love Him*. Then why do so many Christians believe otherwise? Well, just like everyone else, they don't like to feel guilty when they sin, so they start inventing complex "Christian doctrines" to explain away the way they behave.

¹ John 14:15; also John 15:9-10, 14

² 1 John 2:4

³ Deuteronomy 30:11-14

HOW CAN WE BE GOOD?

Understand the Law

Human beings are *moral* beings with free wills, as opposed to being *amoral* beings like the inanimate parts of the creation, for instance, that have no capacity to choose between right and wrong. As moral beings, we cannot be governed by the laws of cause and effect (laws of force, like gravity) and still remain free. If God wants us to remain free, He can only govern us with influence, not force. This isn't imposing a limitation on God's powers; it is simply stating that logically we cannot be free and forced at the same time, not because it is too hard for God to do, but because it is an absurdity. The Bible never claims that God's powers extend to the absurd.

God's commands are not an arbitrary set of rules. They are suited to our natures. They describe how we must behave to maintain loving relationships with God and each other.

Out of His love for us, God also gives us consequences, rewards or punishment, for keeping or breaking the Law, to help influence us to keep it. If we repented and started obeying God, He would like to forgive us the penalty we deserve, but if He

Here are a few of the unbiblical teachings that people have invented to excuse their sin:

ORIGINAL SIN

This is the notion that we are born with sinful natures, which we inherited from Adam and Eve. That would mean that sin is something that we *are*, rather than something that we *choose to do*.

ELECTION

Since (they say) we are completely sinful by nature and we can't choose to respond to God's love, they say that God arbitrarily chooses (or elects) some to be saved and leaves the rest to go to hell.

POSITIONAL SALVATION

This is the idea that God sees us as sinless because of the crucifixion of Jesus, *even though we are still sinning*.¹

ETERNAL SECURITY; OR, "ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED"

Since we can't choose to stop sinning and God forces us to believe in Jesus, He won't change His mind, so we can never lose our salvation *no matter what evil things we do*.

¹ The Bible says that this kind of talk "wearies the Lord." (Malachi 2:17)

did He would be encouraging sin by removing the influence He provided for us to obey. And besides, once we have made our choice to spend our lives gratifying our own desires at the expense of everyone else, why *would* we change?

Understand the Atonement

So then, the Law is holy, righteous, and good.⁴ But if we continue to break the Law, we show that the Law is insufficient to turn our hearts from selfish to loving. We need something else. The Bible teaches that God accomplished this by sacrificing His Son for us.⁵ If we understand what great love was expressed by Jesus' willing sacrifice for us, and we trust in God's love, we will walk in obedience and stop hurting God and each other.⁶ The Bible called Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."⁷ In other words, unlike the sacrificial lambs of the old covenant that could only partially influence people to turn from their sins, Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient to motivate us to stop sinning entirely.⁸

Some imagine that when we get to Heaven, God will magically change our hearts so that we start loving and stop sinning, even though we were unwilling throughout our entire lives. They imagine that He will change our *natures*, by *force*. But then He wouldn't be governing us by influence anymore, our free wills would be gone, and we wouldn't *really* be loving Him. The Bible says that *if* we sin, God is willing, even eager, to forgive us. But the Bible teaches that what He wants most is to change our hearts and for us to start loving and obeying by trusting in the love of God expressed in Jesus' sacrifice for us.⁹ So, "go and sin no more."¹⁰

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⁴ Romans 7:12

⁵ Romans 6:1-23; Romans 8:2-13; 2 Peter 1:3-10; 1 John 4:17-19; John 8:31-36; Matthew 28:20; Acts 3:26; 1 Cor. 1:8

⁶ 1 John 3:3-6

⁷ John 1:29

⁸ Hebrews 9:8-14; Hebrews 10:19-22

⁹ Psalm 40:6; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; Matthew 12:7

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 6:13-14; John 5:14; 2 Peter 3:14; 1 Corinthians 15:34; 1 Thessalonians 5:22-23; 2 Corinthians 7:1;

2 Timothy 2:19-22; 2 Corinthians 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-14; Philippians 2:15; and many more.