

IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING CHRIST'S COMMANDMENTS

Does Jesus have competition in our hearts for our affections and allegiance? Jesus doesn't want to be the **first** of many loves—He wants us to love Him with **all** our heart, and **all** our soul, and **all** our mind. It is the priority commandment—and a proper commandment based on who He is and what He has done. Our heart—our affections—are to be set supremely on Him; more than anything or anyone else. We are to be willing to surrender our very lives to Him if need be. And we are also to love Him with our minds—our intellect. We are to submit to His teaching—not our reasoning and wisdom. We are to seek to know what He says to us and desires from us; and we are to use our minds in a way that draws us closer to Him.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the first and great commandment—but John does not. Does that mean John—the Apostle of Love—did not care whether we love God or not? Not hardly. In fact; I believe the opposite is true because John records some of the strongest words of Jesus regarding our need to love Him.

Please take your Bibles and turn to John 14:15-24. I mentioned last week that I John 4:19 is a good verse to teach even the youngest of children because it is short; John 14:15 is another.

1. Proof of love by those who keep them

Last week I suggested that to **love** God with all our heart, soul, and mind means to **give** Him our heart, and **give** Him our soul, and **give** Him our mind. In the passage I just read, we see a second way that we demonstrate our love to Jesus—by **obeying** Him.

A. That obedience proves our love is declared by Jesus

God used John to write the book of John, but John here is quoting Jesus. Four times in this passage we have words from the lips of Jesus where He plainly states that the 'proof of your love for me is in **obeying** me.'

--v 15 "If ye love me, **keep** my commandments."

--v 21 "He that hath my commandments, and **keepeth** them, he it is that loveth me..."

--v 23 "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will **keep** my words..."

--v 24 "He that loveth me not **keepeth** not my sayings..."

"Keep" is stated all four times; "my commandments" twice; "my words" once; and "my sayings" once.

--Jesus isn't interested in just good intentions because good intentions don't really demonstrate love.

In John 13:37 Peter claimed that he would lay down his life for Jesus' sake. He didn't though, did he? Instead, he denied three times that very night that he even knew Jesus!

--Jesus isn't interested in just noble affections, either. Their sadness over His impending departure did not prove they loved Him.

John 16:5-6 "But now I go my way to Him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?"

⁶ But because I have said these things unto you, **sorrow** hath filled your heart."

John 16:22 "And ye now therefore have **sorrow**: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

--What is Jesus interested in? **Obedience**; doing the things that He commands us.

B. Love preceding our obedience is desired by Jesus

I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but how many of you like to be **told** what to do. Most of us don't, do we? We often don't mind being asked to do something, but when we are told we **have** to do something, our "feathers get ruffled." It is that rebellious spirit within us that wants to rule—not be ruled!

Does Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, have the **right** to tell us what to do? He certainly does! Jesus wants us to obey Him—but He wants that obedience **motivated by love**. I agree with John Piper when he says that loving Jesus is not the same as keeping Jesus' commandments. Why?

--Because people don't always obey God out of love, do they?

Some obey out of duty; many obey out of fear. They understand they are sinful—and that God is the Judge of all that they will meet someday—so they try to obey Him in hopes it will “earn favor” with Him.

--A second reason is because the **tone** of these verses. Although verse 15 sounds like a command in English, it doesn't in the Greek. Verse 15 should read like verse 23: “If ye love me, **you will** keep my words.” Even if verse 15 is a command, verse 21, 23, and 24 are not—they are **desires** of Christ. The point I'm trying to make is this—obedience to Christ's commands is the **result** of loving Jesus. Loving Jesus brings a desire to obey—it comes before the obedience. “Love is the root; obedience is the fruit.”

I know I shared this with you once or twice before, but I remember as a young teen coming to the point where I did what my Dad wanted me to do not for fear of the trouble I would get into if I didn't, but **because I loved him** and wanted to show him that. Christ wants us to obey Him for the same reason—not out of duty and not out of fear—but out of love. And when we do love Him, the natural result will be doing the things that please Him—His commandments.

Do you love Jesus? If you do, it will not be hidden; it will show up as **obedience**. It reminds me of James 2:18 “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” A person may say ‘I love Jesus.’ My response? ‘You show your love without keeping Jesus' commandments, but I'm going to show my love by keeping them because that is what Jesus desires.’

Not only does Jesus tell us that love for Him will result in us keeping His commandments, He also promises certain things to those that do so. Notice the...

2. Promises from the Lord to those who keep them

“Love to Christ is not lost on Christ;” there are blessings bestowed upon us when we love Jesus and keep His commandments. I see three here in this passage.

A. Promise of a special relationship—loved by both the Father and the Son

--v 21 (middle) “...and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him...”

i. It is personal love to us—not the general love to the world

It is true that “God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16).

I John 2:2 is also true: “And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the **sins of the whole world**.” God loved the world and everyone in it—that's why He sent His Son. And Jesus Christ came to die for the sins of everyone in the world—not just a select few.

Just as God is the Creator of all mankind—but not the **Father** of all mankind—Jesus is the Savior, but does not save everyone. Why? Because there are those that refuse to come to Him to be saved.

John 5:40 “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

John 14:6 “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

We need not look any further than the cross for evidence of this. When Jesus was crucified, two other men were crucified at the same time. One mocked Jesus and Luke recorded his words. Notice **Luke 23:39-43** “And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. ⁴⁰ But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?”

⁴¹ And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

⁴² And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

⁴³ And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

--One admitted he was a sinner—the other did not.

--One knew he deserved his punishment—the other did not.

--One acknowledged that Jesus had never sinned—the other did not.

--One believed Jesus was going to His kingdom—the other did not.

--One believed Jesus could bring him to His kingdom—the other did not.

--One asked Jesus to bring him to His kingdom—the other did not.

--One was promised by Jesus that he would be brought to Jesus’ kingdom—the other did not.

--And one entered into a personal relationship with the Savior that day—the other did not!

Anyone and everyone who does what the thief on the cross did—admits their sinfulness and inability to save themselves and asks Jesus for forgiveness and salvation—enters into a personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. And with that relationship comes a personal love to them as an individual—not just the general love that God has for the world.

ii. Special relationship—not a “normal” one

In verse 21, **who** does Jesus say will be loved by the Father and by Him?

--Everyone? No

--Every believer? No

--Those that love Jesus and show they love Jesus by keeping His commandments!

I feel at this point it is necessary to give a disclaimer—these are not easy verses to understand and I do not claim to have all the answers.

For example, is Jesus saying He and the Father only love those that keep Christ’s commandments—and that God doesn’t love His disobedient children? That is obviously not the case because Hebrews 12:6 reminds us “For whom the Lord **loveth** He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” I don’t think I’m going out on a limb to say God chastens us for doing **wrong**—not for doing right! God most certainly loves all His children—even the disobedient ones.

So, is Jesus saying He and the Father love the commandment-keeping children more than His disobedient ones? If His love is conditional and fluctuates based on our obedience or lack thereof, that would make His love incomplete and consequently imperfect—it can be increased when we obey—and decreased when we disobey. Is that what Jesus is implying here? I don’t think so.

What, then, is the relationship between our commandment-keeping and God’s love to us? Again, I won’t be dogmatic and you can “agree to disagree” but here’s my thought: **We experience and feel and sense God’s love the most when we keep His commandments.** Some of you might be thinking ‘Duh, Pastor—we know that! *Everyone* knows that!’ Do they? If so—if God’s children know they will experience and feel and sense God’s love the most when they keep His commandments—why don’t more of them do it?

Blessing #1—we will sense a special love from the Father and the Son. Blessing #2?

B. Promise of a special revelation—“...and will manifest myself to him” (21b)

The word “manifest” comes from the Greek word “*em-fan-id-zo*” and means to “reveal, make known, inform.” What is the manifesting, the revealing that Jesus is referring to?

Some commentators suggest Jesus manifesting Himself to them has to do with His **physical appearances** to them after He rose from the dead. The problem with that line of thinking is that they were not commandment-keepers when He appeared to them—they had all disobeyed Him and failed Him!

Another reason it probably does not refer to the resurrection is the fact that it would only be applicable to them—not to all those who demonstrate their love for Jesus by keeping His commandments.

ii. Holy Spirit versus Jesus Himself

Another thought is that Jesus' manifesting Himself to them was in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was about to leave them and in verse 16 He states that He will pray to the Father to give them another Comforter that would abide with them forever. In the end of verse 17, Jesus says the Holy Spirit was now **with** them—but would be **in them** when the Father sent Him. And in verse 18, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" also probably refers to the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost. Although these are good arguments, it still doesn't account for the correlation between commandment-keeping and the Jesus manifesting Himself to them. The Holy Spirit comes into **all** believers the moment they are saved—before they even have a chance to start obeying commandments! We will look at this a little more when we get to verse 23.

iii. Unique versus usual revelation

If this manifesting of Jesus to those that keep His commandment is not Christ's appearance after His resurrection—or the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—what is it that Jesus is referring to? Again, you are obviously free to disagree, but my take on it is this: it is a unique—as opposed to the usual—manifesting of God to us. It is **not** a revelation of Christ in the form of a dream or vision, but it is an "encounter"—if I can use that word—that is special; it is out of the ordinary.

Matthew Henry put it like this: "He loves them, and **lets them know** that He loves them, smiles upon them, and embraces them." He then adds: "...He gives them tokens of His love, experience of His tenderness, and earnest of His kingdom and glory...."

Blessing #1 of commandment-keeping—promise of a special relationship with the Father and the Son.

Blessing #2—special times of closeness—of manifestations—of God's comfort and presence.

Blessing #3? The....

C. Promise of residence—"...and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (23b)

Again, we must ask: what does Jesus mean when He says "we will come unto Him, and make our abode with Him? Is He referring to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—or something different?

i. Argument against indwelling

Although this passage is obviously talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit that was **with** them and would be **in** them (v 17), Jesus is referring to Himself and the Father. Can you separate the Trinity? Obviously not, but if this is referring to the **Father** indwelling the believer, to the best of my knowledge it is the only verse in the Bible that does so!

ii. Argument for intimacy

Another consideration is that the answer Jesus gives in verse 23 is in response to the question raised by Judas in verse 22. Judas asks Jesus to clarify how He would manifest Himself to them but not to the world. Jesus' response correlates "manifesting Himself" with the Father and Son coming to the commandment-keeper and making their abode with them. Simply put, whatever Jesus means by "manifesting" in verse 21 means the same thing as "coming to" and "abiding with" in verse 23.

Are there times when we sense more closely the love and presence of God? There are, aren't there? Some of you know there are because you've experienced it for yourself. When do these instances occur? Spurgeon makes the following suggestions:

(1) Times of duty. I never found a lazy or indifferent Christian have a manifestation of Jesus Christ; I never heard one who gave himself wholly to business talk much of spiritual manifestations. Those who do but little for Christ, Christ does but little for them in the way of special favors. The men who are the most zealous for their Master discern the most of His loving kindness, and enjoy His richest blessings.

(2) In seasons of trial. Do not complain then; for it is in the time of trouble we see most of Jesus. Previous to trial you may generally expect a season of joy. But when the trial comes, then expect to have delight with it.

Can God crash into your life and reveal Himself to you when you are disobedient? He certainly can, but I agree with Spurgeon—He is much more likely to draw near to us when we are drawing near to Him. He also draws near in times of trial. Horatio G. Spafford, the writer of *It is Well with My Soul*, is a classic example. Many of you are familiar with the history of this song, but some of you are not.

Horatio G. Spafford (1828-1888), was a Presbyterian layman from Chicago. He had established a very successful legal practice as a young businessman and was also a devout Christian. Among his close friends were several evangelists including the famous Dwight L. Moody, also from Chicago.

Spafford's fortune evaporated in the wake of the great Chicago Fire of 1871. Having invested heavily in real estate along Lake Michigan's shoreline, he lost everything overnight. In a saga reminiscent of Job, his son died a short time before his financial disaster. But the worst was yet to come.

Hymnologist Kenneth Osbeck tells the story: "Desiring a rest for his wife and four daughters as well as wishing to join and assist Moody and [his musician Ira] Sankey in one of their campaigns in Great Britain, Spafford planned a European trip for his family in 1873. In November of that year, due to unexpected last-minute business developments, he had to remain in Chicago, but sent his wife and four daughters on ahead as scheduled on the S.S. Ville du Havre. He expected to follow in a few days.

On November 22, 1873, the ship was struck by another ship and sank in twelve minutes. Several days later the survivors were finally landed at Cardiff, Wales, and Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband, 'Saved alone.'

Spafford left immediately to join his wife. Per previous arrangement, the captain informed Spafford as they neared the place where his four daughters were thought to have drowned. And it is there where he is said to have penned these words:" When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. First and foremost, are you a child of God? God loves you and sent Jesus Christ to die for you. But if you die unforgiven, you will spend eternity separated from Him enduring His wrath instead of enjoying His love.
2. Child of God—are you tired of a "ho-hum" Christian life? Do you want to sense the love of Christ more deeply and more often in your life? Get to know what pleases Him by spending time with Him—then do what He tells you to do!