



Do you like to play guessing games? I have one for you to start our time off this morning. See if you can guess the main theme of today's sermon.

Today's sermon is on a topic that, single-handedly, reveals how close your relationship is with God.

Today's sermon topic is something that some of you do well naturally and some of you struggle with.

Today's sermon topic has been misunderstood for thousands of years.

Today's sermon topic has often been and continues to be counterfeited.

The topic for today's sermon can be summed up in one word.

What is it?

Obedience.

How many of you are natural rule followers? How many of you are natural rule breakers?

Years ago I wrestled with this question: do I love God? *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35).

I thought the answer was "yes." To give you some context, I was a pastor. I had made a heartfelt commitment to follow Jesus as my Savior and King. I was involved in ministering to people whose lives were clearly being impacted in a good way.

Yet, I was pestered by this question—do I love God? More pointedly, I wanted to know, how could I know that I did, in fact, love God?

It's an important question, isn't it? Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

So as much as I wanted my answer to be, "Yes, I love God," I was looking for some tangible, objective measure to show it. Otherwise, I could potentially deceive myself into believing that I loved God, when in fact I didn't.

So the question of, do I love God? led me to a second question: If I **do** love God, how will I **know**? How could I know, for sure, that I really loved God? Will it just be some vague undefined feeling I get in my gut? Is there a clearer measure? This is where we return to my questions posed to you earlier about obedience.

The scriptures that we are looking at in John 14 tell us that obedience to God is the tangible evidence that we love him. Love reveals itself through obedience. If a person claims to love God, they will obey God's Word. That's the answer. Pretty simple and straightforward. However, there's a surprise twist coming. But before we get to that twist, let's address this idea that love reveals itself through obedience.

Love reveals itself through obedience

"If you love me, you will keep my commands" (John 14:15).

"Whoever has my commands and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21).

"Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word...'" (John 14:23).

"Whoever does not love me does not keep my words" (John 14:24).

Love reveals itself through obedience in two ways:

#1. Following the laws, commands, decrees, rules of the Bible.

Consider the parent and child relationship. The parent is appropriately in charge. They are older, more mature and responsible. The child by nature is curious, inexperienced and short-sighted, not to mention rebellious. So it is the parent's role to train and teach their child. This comes with rules and structure; rewards and punishment. It's through these that a child grows to become mature and responsible themselves. Similarly, our relationship with God follows this pattern. As the perfect heavenly Father, he guides us with rules and structures. The Bible has a lot of words for these: commands, word, decrees, statutes, laws, etc.

This parallel breaks down because parents are not perfect. Parents make mistakes. But if you imagine a perfect parent—perfectly loving, perfectly just, perfectly insightful—think about the benefits of following this parent's commands. It would be foolish to disobey. And Jesus is saying in John 14, in addition to being foolish, it shows that the child doesn't love.

*My father made laws to protect everyone,
Every cat, every girl, every boy.
And while we obeyed him and lived by his rules,
Our kingdom abounded in joy.
But look at us now – the place is a wreck.
Oh, why should there be so much pain?*

*I beg you, return to the ways of the king,
For living like this is insane!*

The people in this story thought that living by laws was restrictive so when they got a chance to throw off the laws, they did. Chaos, abuse and messiness followed. It was only by returning to the laws of the good king that they regained order.

God gives us laws because he knows what we need. He knows what's best for us because he created us.

The objection: Commands are burdensome and restrictive, therefore I don't like them. That's a natural feeling for many. In an attempt to deal fairly with this objection, we should take a step back and look, not at a specific rule that we don't like, but at the nature of the person giving the rules.

For example, if you think a specific law is unloving, look at the nature of God to determine if he is apathetic or cruel. If you think a specific law curtails fun, look at the nature of God to determine if he is boring.

When we follow a process like this, what we should discover is that God's laws protect us, help us, and grant us the best life possible. Our desires to rebel against his laws are born from our rebellious hearts, not flawed laws. The bottom line, God knows what's best for us and created laws for our good and God's glory.

Here are some appropriate examples of how a follower of God should respond to his commands: ***"I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way"*** (Psalm 119:102–104).

"Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way" (verses 127–128).

#2. Walk by faith. Walk into unknown situations, trusting God, living by faith, when he's called us to do something.

Think about the challenge that awaits these eleven disciples: Jesus will be killed, he'll rise again, then he'll ascend into heaven leaving them to tell the story to the world. They will have to walk in obedience . . . walk into unknown situations.

Trust God.

Live by faith.

That's so hard for us because we like to grab the reigns of our own lives. Often places God leads us to are scary. We're placed out of our comfort zones. A response like this does not come naturally to us. It is learned over time as we learn about God and trust him.

Down/Stay

Our family dog is named Charlie. He's a one-and-a-half-year-old Labradoodle, a great dog for our family. And in general, a well-behaved dog. But I would love for him to be one of those dogs who obeys. I was watching a dog training video and the trainer was emphasizing the 30-minute down/stay. In this position, your dog will lay down, in the midst of activity, for 30 minutes straight. The trainer said this is a foundational behavior between dog and master. Because when your dog can do this, your dog accepts that it can receive more happiness and satisfaction in obeying his master than following his own desires. Until that 30 minutes benchmark is achieved, your dog continues to think, "I know the best way to make myself happy. I'm going to chase that ball, squirrel, etc."

Dogs are created to fit into a social environment of authority. They are the most happy and content under the authority of a good master. When the trainer said this, I paused the video, sat on my couch and thought, "That is just like me and God. I am better off when I've learned to obey God in a 30-minute down/stay."

What does obedience have to do with love? It seems that obedience is power-hungry, or maybe obedience has to do with respect, or maybe obedience has to do with social order and love is heart-felt.

To explain this let me build upon a few statements. The rules/laws of God flow from his very nature. You cannot separate God from his commands. Since they flow from his nature, to know God involves knowing his rules/laws. And to fully love God, a person must also love what God loves.

The objection: "I'm better off when I do life my way." Now we can learn an amazing insight on this from Jesus in John 14:31: ***"But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."***

Jesus showed his love by being obedient too. Jesus, God in flesh, placed himself under the authority of God the Father and obeyed. He is showing us that when we place ourselves under the appropriate authority of God, we are in the best place.

The objection: What about failure? Don't the scriptures guarantee that we'll never reach perfect obedience while I'm on earth? So when we fail, does that mean we don't love God? To answer this question, I'm going to give you two ideas to consider:

1. Part of obedience is repentance when we fail.
2. Obedience develops over time, meaning that our love for God does too.

By this point I hope it's crystal clear that the scriptures teach that love reveals itself through obedience. I told you there was a

twist coming and here it is: obedience is impossible without the Holy Spirit. ***"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you"*** (John 14:15–18).

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (verses 26–27).

There are two possible Greek words for "another." *Allos* = another just like the first one. This is the Greek word in v. 16. Jesus was the first Helper; the Holy Spirit is the second. *Heteros* = totally different. How does he help us? He guides us. He's present with us: ***"be with you forever"*** (v.16); ***"not leave you as orphans"*** (v. 18); ***"not as the world gives do I give to you"*** (v. 27). The idea here is that you and I are always going to be supported, empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit. Always.

Remember last week Jesus said I am The Truth. Well now, The Spirit since he's united with Jesus, is called The Spirit of Truth. He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things. The Spirit's role is to teach you, tutor you and instruct you. He whispers thoughts into your head because he reminds you of the truth. For the disciples, the Spirit would remind them of personal experiences and words Jesus said. For us, he will remind us of the scriptures we've read.

The byproduct is peace, ***"don't let your hearts be troubled"*** (v. 27). This is a byproduct of the Spirit's work. Because he is all powerful and all loving, his presence yields both peace and a trouble-free heart.

He dwells with you and in you (v. 17). The Spirit is not just alongside you, supporting you and encouraging you. He is also inside of you, granting you power to obey his instructions and his direction. Here is the big connection to obedience. The Spirit empowers you to obey!

Imagine that I want to learn to surf. My friend Eric is teaching me the basics and the moves. After a bit of instruction on the sand, he sends me into the waves to give it a try. I struggle for 15 minutes to paddle through the wave break but my arms aren't strong enough to power me through. Eric instructed me, but I'm incapable of doing it alone.

After watching me struggle from the beach, Eric paddles out, instructs me to hold onto his foot and he pulls me through the wave break. Not only has he instructed me, now he is with me, empowering me to do it. That's like the Holy Spirit. But it gets even better than this.

As I am attempting to ride my surfboard on a wave, I keep falling. Again, although I've been instructed on how to do this, I'm incapable of doing it alone. So let's enter the fictional world. Imagine that Eric transforms himself and gets inside my body. I'm still moving my limbs but Eric is also able to move me. As a wave comes along, empowered by Eric inside of me, my arms are paddling to catch the wave, I pop up on my feet and I hold my balance. I am surfing. Although it feels like I'm doing it, I'm aware that I'm not doing it alone.

This is exactly how it works when the Holy Spirit works within us to obedience.

So what about you? What is your greatest need for obedience today? What is your greatest need for the Holy Spirit today?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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