

St. Matthew's Church

NEW YORK CITY

KEEP MY COMMANDS

John 14:15-21

Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2009

To John there is only one test of love and that is obedience. It was by His obedience that Jesus showed His love of God; and it is by our obedience that we must show our love of Jesus. We must never allow love to devolve into a sentiment or emotion. Its expression is always moral and is revealed in obedience. We know all too well how there are those who protest their love in words but who, at the same time, bring pain and heartbreak to those whom they claim to love. There are husbands who say they love their wives and wives who say they love their husbands, and who yet, by their inconsiderateness and their irritability and their thoughtless unkindness bring pain to the one to the other. To Jesus real love is not an easy thing. It is shown only in true obedience.

We admit, or course...indeed, we must proclaim it widely, that salvation is never by works, that it is always by grace. At this point law and grace are opposites. The Book of Galatians stands as a commanding witness to that face. We will even admit that the proper way to live the Christian life is not by imposing a list of rules (even God-given rules) either upon others or ourselves. To do this may assure an outward conformity to a certain external expression of Christian character. But it does not change the heart and that is why love, not law, must lie at the heart of Christian ethics. In this, the exponents of situation ethics, or the new morality, are right. But having said this, we must immediately go on to add that any love that does not express itself in conformity with the commands of Christ is not the kind of love about which Christ was speaking. Indeed, it is a pseudo-love, a love that is false in itself and that deals falsely with the one espousing it. Love may be valuable guideline, but only if it is love in conformity with the love of God and therefore also in conformity with the commandments He has given. What we want is not law, but power, and what the Gospel gives us, and stands alone in giving us, is not merely the knowledge of the will of God, but the power to become it.

Love One Another: If we read these words... **“If you love me, you will obey what I command”**...and then ask, as we must, “But what are Christ’s commandments?” We are immediately led back to the greatest of all commandments found in John 13: **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34)**. In other words, if we love Jesus, we must (and will) love other Christians. Do you love others? You must not be too quick to answer, for in the New Testament the love about which Jesus is speaking is very practical. It means at least three things.

First, it means *service*. This is evident from the context in which the new commandment was given. Jesus had just divested Himself of His clothing, girded Himself with a towel, and then had washed the disciples’ feet. The saying of Peter, **“You shall never wash my feet” (John 13:8)**. But Jesus corrected Peter and then taught them all: **“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:13-14)**. That is the picture Jesus gave of true Christianity. It is the attitude that divests itself of its own prerogatives in order to serve others.

Second, the practice of love means *sacrifice*. This means that we are not called to serve only when we can do so conveniently and at no cost to ourselves. It means that we are called to serve at our cost when we would much rather do something else. Jesus did this obviously; for His parable of service, washing the disciples’ feet, was completed only when He had gone to the Cross and there made the atonement by which alone they could be washed from the contamination of sin.

Thirdly, the practice of love also means *sharing*. Sharing of ourselves, on the one hand, and sharing the Gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, on the other. Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). Jesus also said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of Holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

My one final point is a reversal of the third, just as the second point was reversal of the first. It is this: If we love others, then we can know that we truly love Jesus and are one of His own. John says it clearly, “*So not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death*” (1 John 3:13-14). According to these words, we can be assured that we are truly born again if, in obedience to Christ’s commands, we find ourselves beginning to love and actually loving others for whom He also died.

It is only to the man who is looking for Him that God reveals Himself; and it is only to the man who, in spite of failure, is reaching up that God reaches down. Fellowship with God and the revelation of God are dependent on love; the more we understand Him; and the man who walks in His way inevitably walks with Him.

- Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
- And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
- And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.
- Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
- Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
- Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
- Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.
- For we know in part and we prophesy in part.
- But when that which is perfect has come then that which is in part will be done away.
- When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

- For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.
- And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

There is only one way in which you will come to love God, and that is by coming to know and believe in His love for you. Love provokes love. His love calls forth yours. Consequently, the way to love God is to learn that He loved you so much that He gave His only begotten Son for your salvation.

Oh, I want to see Him and look upon the face of the One who saved me by grace. What a day that will be! What a day! Amen