

Faith, Hope, & Love

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." I don't know how many times I've heard this growing up. It would be interesting to know how many times I've quoted this passage when speaking to someone I had a genuine concern for. There are actually several passages that basically say the same thing:

- **John 14:15** If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.
- **John 14:21** Whoever has My commandments 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 14:23** Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.
- **John 15:10** If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.
- **1 John 5:3** For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.
- **2 John 6** And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

All of these passages were recorded by John. The majority were taught by Jesus in the upper room before He was betrayed. He spoke to His apostles, who would receive the Holy Spirit and guide them in all truth. The last two were written by John. He fought against false depictions of Christ and the inevitable application that would follow. He reminded his audience that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God, and true believers accept this as truth. They will love and obey God and one another.

What stands out to you in these passages? Let's go back to the first one. Let me be clear: I understand why this passage was stressed so much growing up. Many friends and acquaintances of ours growing up, who claimed to be Christ's followers, didn't walk like Jesus. They would attend services on Sunday, but that was about it. Or their churches would downplay obedience or, at times, leave the impression that stressing obedience was legalistic. Of course, there was concern surrounding obedience to God's word regarding worship, behavior, marriage, etc. So I'd hear this again and again: They're really not loving God because they're not obeying Him.

You may think: "I sense he's about to take issue with that, but I'm not sure why." Well, I do, and I don't. You don't need to apologize for teaching obedience to God. Also, it is true that if a person does not obey God, they do not love Him. I mean that in the way Jesus did. My concern is that a passage like this is isolated, and we can be guilty of hyper-focus without remembering the motive: love.

Why do you obey God? See, this is where we begin to part ways. Some people obey God because they don't want to go to hell. Others obey Him because they love Him.

Is your life motivated by love or fear? I'm not saying there isn't a time for fear. I guarantee you that the crowd in Acts was a little afraid when the truth of who was on the cross sunk in. Imagine being told - you killed God's Son. I'm saying that your life should not be motivated by a dreadful fear of judgment but by the love of God. I've read this to you many times, but let me reread it: **1 John 4:15-19**.

What's my point in all of this? To encourage a love for God, first and foremost, because He is love, and it's *why* we serve Him. When a vine is rooted in the love of God, the vine will be healthy and bear good fruit. That's **John 15:1-11**. What should bother us more is not someone saying, "You're not obedient, so you're going to hell." (Hopefully, someone wouldn't be so harsh, but you understand the point.) What should bother us more than anything is realizing that our lack of obedience is saying to God, "I don't love you." I mentioned during our Wednesday get-together that one of the most beautiful experiences I have had in life is hearing you (in particular, those who are older) express their sadness when they sin because they "let their Father down and hurt Him." I have literally heard that from those of you here. Love is a game-changer.

This is all well and good, but what is love? "God is love!" That's true. What does that mean? What does it look like? Here's another area that needs balance in our teaching, preaching, and counseling. We've all heard about the variations of love in the Bible. Agape. If you're like me, you're familiar with a handful or two of Greek terms, and this is one of them. There are different shades of love. Romantic. Friendship. Brotherly. Emotional. The most common use is agape. This is a loyal kind of love. It seeks the good of someone else regardless of their feelings towards you or yours towards them. In other words - it's not driven by emotion but by principle. As the BEB explained: "moral goodwill which proceeds from esteem, principle, or duty, rather than attraction or charm. Agapē means to love the undeserving, despite disappointment and rejection." *R.E.O. White, "Love," Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1357.*

You may know where I'm about to go with this. Over time, I have come to be very careful about putting too much emphasis on variations in Greek for two reasons:

- I've been warned by those who know the Greek not to do so (most from what I've read/listened to, but also face-to-face).
- Context is king and will illustrate our need for caution. Here are some examples. I've heard that we're never commanded to love God in the emotional sense because God can't force that upon us. Or the over-emphasizing of agape love by some (not all) that leaves you with the impression that emotional love is second-class.
 - **Matthew 10:37-39** "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (This is phileo, which is a friendly, affectionate love).
 - **John 11:36** So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (Phileo)
 - **John 16:27** for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. (Phileo)

- **1 Corinthians 16:22** If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! (Phileo)
- **Revelation 2:4** But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. (Agape - yet they were commended for their obedience)

Brethren, does God have a heart for you? Yes. Does God want the best for you? Yes. Is He committed to you? Yes. Are you always easy to love? No. Are you worthy of His love? No. But, will He be faithful to you, a flawed being? Yes. **Deuteronomy 7:7-9; 2 Timothy 2:11-13.**

Here's what we should all take away from the multiple passages on love (all 745 in the ESV!):

- **Mark 12:28-34** And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that He answered them well, asked Him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." And the scribe said to Him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that He is one, and there is no other besides Him. And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask Him any more questions."
- **John 3:16 with 1 John 3:16-18 with 1 Corinthians 13:1-7**
 - It's a labor of love, brethren. May God bless us as we carry our cross, and may we do so, having been motivated by His love and example.