

If you love me, obey my commandments
(John 15:9-17)

Can I just remind you of our reading this morning? These are the words of Jesus from the Gospel of John. "If you love me you will keep my commandments."

Well I have a question for you this morning...

How much do you love Jesus?

Well, you know, Jesus has the answer already. He says, 'if you love me you will keep my commandments.' (John 14:15, & 15:9). Obedience to the commandments is a measure of our love for him. So this morning I think it would be a good opportunity to *consider* how much we love the LORD. To have a look at ourselves, and what our relationship with him is like. And if we really do love Jesus – how well are we doing at keeping his commandments?

Now you may ask why the Lord puts so much emphasis on obeying his commandments. The commandments of God reflect the character of God. You see the God of Israel and of the Christian church is a holy God. This was quite unlike the Greco- Roman gods of the day who were violent, promiscuous, and spiteful. Our God is a perfectly moral God. He is the One God. He is without any corruption and so sets the standard for morality. Peter in his letter to the early Christians in Rome encouraged the followers of the One God, the God of Israel, to be holy as He is Holy. Peter writes...

'As obedient children do not conform to the evil practices when you lived in ignorance. But be holy in all you do. For it is written, 'Be holy because I am holy.' (1 Peter 1:16). Our Lord wants us to be *part* of his holiness. I suppose that it is what it means to be part of the Body of Christ. And Jesus prunes any part of that which is not holy.

Now I wonder what you think about the request by the Lord to be holy? In one sense it is a phenomenal request? 'To be Holy as I am Holy'. But the Lord would not ask it if it were not possible. And it begins with being 'born again', being born of the Holy Spirit. We are able to call upon God to help us overcome our disobedience and move towards being obedient to the commandments of God.

So for the rest of this morning's short talk, let us examine our hearts in the light of God's love for us.

It is very easy to neglect the **responsibilities** that are placed on our shoulders when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Master. Our lives, our speech, even our thoughts have to live up to a certain pattern. It is expected of us. And the early apostles and church women who were sent out by the LORD and their churches were constantly encouraging their congregations and communities to be transformed by the renewal of their minds in Christ Jesus. (Romans 12:2)

In his Letter to the Colossian Church. Paul advises the early believers about their new life in Christ. 'Put to death together whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language and lies!'

And then he goes onto say, 'on the other hand clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, gentleness, humility, patience, forgiving one another, forbearing with one another in love. (Colossians chapter 3 verse 5)

Now Jesus does not want all these instructions to become a burden to us. We know that Jesus endorses the moral law, the Ten Commandments, but he wants them written on our hearts, not on cold slabs of stone. Many of you will know that I was a secondary school teacher for 17 years and so I know a lot about school rules. And even though they were on every corridor wall they didn't mean anything unless the naughty student had a change of heart. And when there was that change of heart – when they began to see that the school was there to for their welfare, and that the school loved and cared for them. Eureka! – it was like they were born-again! We saw a total change of character. And on those occasions when they would slip back into their old selves they were remorseful and made amends. And it the same as us as Christians.

You see Jesus is not into lists. But he is interested in your heart. And the only way that we are going to follow the commandments is if we love God. But remember He first loved us. Our change of hearts comes through inviting God by his Holy Spirit to minister to our hearts. Once our hearts are changed then our attitude to God and his commandments change. And because we love Jesus, you will *have the* commandments written on your hearts. Just like when we love another person, we are prepared to give ourselves over to that person, even when it hurts, even when it is sacrificial. It is the same for Jesus. As Christians we have a great love for the one who gave it all for our redemption. The one who loves deeper than we will ever know.

Well I wonder how you are doing? I wonder where you are on your journey with the Lord? I have to stand before God this morning and ask myself, 'Am I doing enough?'. Am I really trying to emulate in my life those virtues that are required of us? I think it is tough. But no one said it was going to be easy. But we have the Counsellor the Holy Spirit to assist us. When temptation comes, and it does come, I try to remember God's great love for me. And I do this by focusing on Jesus. He is my friend and He knows me by name. Of course he does. He is God.

Well, as I finish can I encourage you to take some time to reflect on your obedience to Christ. It is very easy to say that we love one another, but do we really? When we are asked, 'do we love?', 'Are we patient?', 'Are we forgiving.' We all say 'Yes!'. But are we really that good at loving one another. I have seen the nicest and the gentlest of people under certain circumstances exhibit nastiness both in the home and the workplace. It can happen to us all. Often we speak the harshest words to those who are closest to us. So let us not be too glib or too casual when we talk about the two greatest commandments. Loving God and Loving our neighbour. Instead, when the time of trial comes, and it will come, may we fix our eyes firmly on the one who gave it all for us. AMEN.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help us in those times when temptation is near and our flesh is weak. Fill us with your holy spirit and help us keep our focus on you LORD who know us by name and love us with an everlasting love. AMEN.