

John 14:15-21

Do you love Jesus? Do you keep His commandments? I'm sure we would all say "Yes" to the first question, but would any of us say yes to the second? Rather, we might answer, "not perfectly...well, at least I try to keep them."

How can we, who confessed earlier that we are "sinful and unclean," and that we have sinned against God in "thought, word, and deed," answer, "Sure, I keep God's commandments!" But if we fail to keep them, how is it that we can say, "Yes, I love Jesus!" For He says, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."*

There seems to be a problem here. And yes, there is. The problem is with how we understand what Jesus says by "My commandments." Jesus' commandments are not the Ten Commandments. What Jesus commands is not a set of rules to follow. Jesus' commandments are tied to love, yes, but not our love to Him as much as His love for us. *"Come unto Me,"* commands Jesus *"All you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* *"Pray this way,"* He commands, *"...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."* *"Abide in Me, and I in you,"* commands Jesus. *"Take eat...take drink...for the forgiveness of your sins."*

Jesus commands not to accuse us, but to invite us. We know the Law, the Ten Commandments God gave through Moses. And we know that we have done a poor job of obeying the Law, for we are "sinful and unclean." Jesus' commandments are not more laws that we are simply unable to obey because we are sinners, but they are kind promises and invitations for sinners like us.

Picture Jesus' commandments in this way...a young child thoroughly disobeys his mom. He does wrong and is disciplined for it. Sobbing on his pillow, he hears his mom say, "Son, come here." He turns and sees his mom with arms out ready to embrace him with love. Her command to "come here" is not another law for him to disobey, but pure gospel telling him that she forgives him. As he runs to her and is held tightly by her, he is reassured that her love for him is very real, and so is his love for her.

Were we to measure our love for God based on how well we keep the Ten Commandments, we would have to admit that we do not love Him all that much. And, in fact, this is what we confess with the words, "We have not loved You with our whole heart." The world has the Ten Commandments, for everyone has the law written on their heart at birth. But the world does not love God. Love for God does not flow out of our striving to obey Him. It flows out of Him, like that mother, stretching out His arms on the cross to embrace us. We are like the disobedient boy running to those outstretched arms. And we are reassured that Jesus' love for us is very real. And because He loves us in this way, we also love Him.

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments...Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me." Jesus speaks these words to His disciples, and not to the world, for the world cannot love Him. All the world has is what God gave through Moses, not what He gave through Jesus. But He wants the world to have that too, and to love Him. Christ died for

everyone in the world, for He loved the world. *“Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden,”* is an invitation to all who are burdened with the load of sin and guilt. But the world thinks that being a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, is merely obeying a set of rules.

There was a boy who knew what it was to be a Christian. He loved Jesus. He knew Jesus as His loving Savior who stretched out His arms for him. He also loved his daddy, and it made him sad that his daddy was not a Christian. This little boy was dying. As he lay on his bed, his daddy holding his hand, he said, “Daddy, I’m going to heaven soon. What is the reason I should tell Jesus why you won’t love Him?” It’s not that his father hated Jesus. Love and hate are not opposites. Apathy is the opposite of love. His father just didn’t care about Jesus. But that did not prevent Jesus from caring about him, from loving him, and from dying on a cross for him. And God gave this father a precious little boy to show his daddy what faith and love in Jesus was all about.

You and I say that we love Jesus. Yet, isn’t it true that too often we live as if we just don’t care that much? We don’t have hate for Jesus, just apathy at times. That boy who was sobbing on his pillow did not have apathy for his mommy. When he saw her outstretched arms full of love, he ran into her arms. This is what Jesus commands us to do. *“Come to Me”* He invites. *“Be baptized...hear My words of life for you...eat and drink My meal of grace for you.”* Because you love Jesus, you run into His arms. They are outstretched for you. His hands are pierced for you. It’s for you that He died. It’s you that He forgives. There isn’t one of you who is left out. Jesus’ love and forgiveness for you is very real. Of this, each and every one of you can be assured. Amen.