

The life of loving obedience

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 July 2016

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Technological twiddle in the middle of this, but this is what we've been looking at this morning. So I think that Ben and Jerry's ice cream, this is the third time this is working now, and I think it is a good sort of starting point.

Does it matter whether Ben and Jerry ever existed? Not particularly. But church, does it matter if Jesus existed? Does it matter if Jesus is alive?

And the absolute matter is totally, the total thing is Jesus. It is all about him.

And so what we've been looking is how to be a Christian without Jesus' physical, personal presence. And the questions raised in the text about his physical absence.

And I've said, I think it's reasonably true, it's a bit of an approximation, but it's reasonably true that in these chapters, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, Jesus is sort of threading together various things about the life that we as post-resurrection Christians live.

[1:19] And prayer is very important. Jesus' words are very important. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is absolutely key. And then this life of loving obedience, which is what we're going to look at this evening.

And so this evening we're going to look at, did you notice in the reading, one of the strands is obedience. So look at 14, 15, if you love me, you will obey what I command.

And as I want to show that, that particular thread crops up in a number of places and is linked in various important ways. So we're going to look at the life of loving obedience.

And you might say, really not up for this this evening. Because I've always been taught, you might say, we are saved by grace.

And what he's about to talk about seems to be bringing in works through the back door. Get the point?

[2:30] Salvation is by grace. We are saved not according to works that we have done. But this is about obedience. So you might be thinking that. You might be thinking, I thought, you might be thinking, obeying commandments.

That's all ten commandments, Moses, Old Testament. That's all old stuff. We've got past that in the New Testament. We live in a day of grace. You might be thinking that. You might be thinking, I just can't face up to what he might be going to say today because I don't.

I know that my life contains disobedience. I often fall and sin. So you might be thinking that. And you might be thinking, I do want to know more of the work of the Holy Spirit.

But is this that we're looking at this evening, is this the way? Because there are various competing promises concerning the work of the Spirit, aren't there?

I mean, putting it almost at a caricature that people say you need to go to a meeting where you go up at the front. Somebody does something to you, sort of zaps you, you fall over backwards.

[3:46] That's how you receive the Spirit. And you might even have known churches where they teach you that. And this is very different. So who's right? And you might be thinking, is this really saying that the Christian life is like being a monk or a nun living in a monastery?

So we just sort of isolate ourselves and concentrate on finding the Spirit. Is that really what it is? So it seems to be totally unrealistic in ordinary life.

And you might also say, if we're going to be doing stuff about obedience and the Spirit, where's Jesus in all this? So those are the questions. And what I'd like to do is look at the text.

And then possibly we'll come back to these questions and see if we can answer them. So let's look at the texts. And I'm picking up the thread, which is the thread where it says keeping commands or keeping words.

So let's look at them. Or something like that. So there's a limited number. 13 to 17 is the foot-washing bit. It's the foot-washing thing.

[5:00] Jesus is washing his disciples' feet. And could Jerome, please, in a nice loud voice, give us chapter 13, verse 17. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Thank you. So I put up there, you'll be blessed if you. Could somebody finish the sentence? Do them. That's interesting, isn't it?

You'll be blessed if you do them. I've told you this before. I went to the University of Sussex to the Christian Union there and asked them to finish that sentence. And one of them said, you'll be blessed if you meditate on this.

But it doesn't say that, does it? It says you'll be blessed if you do it. 14, 15. If you love me, you will obey what I command.

And, and what's the and? Yep. The things that I command you. Yeah. And then after, after that, how does it lead on from there?

[6:06] I would ask the Father, I need to give you another counsel. Right. So there seems to be a link there between loving, obeying, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now, it may be just a fluke of, maybe there ought to be a chapter division there and then you wouldn't seem to think there was a connection. But on the face of it, it looks like there's a connection, doesn't it? If you love me, if, you will obey what I command and I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor, comforter to be with you forever.

It does seem to be linked with keeping my commandments. 14, 21. 14, 21.

Ruth, could you read that out for us in a nice loud voice, please? Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.

He who loves me will be loved by my Father and I too will love him and show myself to him. Thank you very much. So there's another connection there, isn't there?

[7:17] So how does the connection work? Let's just have a little look. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, He is the one who loves me.

So there's a connection between loving Jesus and obeying his commands. Is that right? So if somebody says, I love you, Lord Jesus, I really love you, and then goes away and doesn't keep his commands, Jesus would say, well, that was just a load of hot air.

Or whatever, a load of pointless emotion. Yeah? Whoever has my commands and obeys them, He is the one who loves me.

And then, He who loves me will be loved by my Father. So there's a connection between, it seems to go around in a sort of circle. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father.

So it is a response of love. The Father, He first loves us, we love Him in return, He loves us.

[8:25] And there is this revelation of Jesus to the person. I too will love Him and show myself to Him. So that seems to, that's a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit, isn't it?

The showing of Jesus to the disciples. 14:23. 14:23. 14:23.

Rod, please, could you read that in a now-slowed voice for us? Jesus again speaking, If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.

My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. Yeah, could you give us the next verse as well, please? He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

These words you hear are not my own, they belong to the Father who sent me. Thank you. Okay, so that's another, another text, connecting love and obedience and then connecting love and the presence of the Father and the Son, or at least the Father it is in this text, isn't it, with the presence in the person who does the loving and that is, as we know, by the Holy Spirit.

[9:50] Okay. And 15:10. 15:10. Let's have a look. I think I probably meant 9.

Chapter 15, verse 9. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands

and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

And then it carries on to verse 17, where it says, this is my command, love each other. Now having said all those things, I think that is most of the times this particular thread pops up in the strands of Jesus' teaching.

So that's the raw material and we need to come back to those. I'll put them back on the screen, I think, in a moment. So how do we draw that out?

[11:13] So here's some questions that I think would help us. Number one question. How does Jesus relate to the Father according to these texts?

Actually, I'm going to make this far too difficult if I give you all those questions at once. How does Jesus relate to the Father? So let's go back. Let's do this one together.

I think you want to be looking in 15, 9 and 10. And can anybody tell us what does Jesus say about the way he relates to his Father in chapter 15, verses 9 and 10?

Well, I'll tell you what. Ask your neighbor what they think for a moment and then we'll see. Chapter 15, verses 9 and 10. How does Jesus relate to his Father in this matter?

Let's go. So what was the answer?

[13:08] How does Jesus relate to the Father? What does the text say? It says that, doesn't it?

That he is obedient to the Father. Remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

So just taking that top question. How does Jesus relate to the Father? Answer by obeying his Father's commands. Is that true?

That's what it says. So let's try and write some of these things in. Ah!

Oh, yeah, I could put... Do you consider that to be problematic?

[14:20] Do you consider that to be offensive and off-putting in any way? Ruth?

Not that I know what's about the paper. Do you want to say, how did Jesus relate to the Father? Also by the modelling of the love that his Father has shown us. He said, as the Father loved me, so I have loved you.

Thank you. Thank you very much. Yeah. He... Let me just think. Say it again. Say the text again. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now we're making our love. Hmm. So you said that's modelling. As the Father has loved me.

So have I... Yeah, okay. Mimicking. Mimicking. Yes. Yeah. Let's do... So mimicking. Imitating.

[15:21] Communicating. Reflecting. Reflecting. Let's put reflecting. So that's helpful.

So we could ask the question, does the Father love Jesus because he obeys him? So is it a sort of meritorious relationship in that sense?

Yes. Yes. I think it is quite meritorious. I think he does love Jesus, but Jesus loves him. Yes.

And within the love, the obeying is part of that. It's just... Yes. So that love and respect and reverence are saying, you told it an easier thing.

Do that unless you didn't have one. Yes. Yes. Yes. Okay. It sort of fits rather beautifully together. And we find it problematic only if we sort of fragment it.

[16:36] Because Jesus says, as the Father has loved me. So he's not talking about... No. He's talking about a love that has a givenness about it.

The Father loves the Son. It's not a thing that generates insecurity in the Son. So we might have had fathers who gave us the impression they only loved us if we got straight A's in our exams. And who only loved us if we lived up to standards which we never managed to keep. And in a human being, that generates insecurity and guilt and all sorts of things like that.

So I don't think the relationship between the Father and the Son is like that. As the Father has loved me. Jesus is very sure of the Father's love. But there is another aspect.

I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. So how does the Son remain in the Father's love? Answer by obeying his commands.

[17:42] That's what it says, isn't it? So I personally think of it in a sort of ongoing sense that Jesus, knowing the Father's love, as he walks forward in life, is always confronted, as it were, by choices as to which way to go.

And if he could go to the left or to the right. And in each case, he chooses to go to the way that the Father commands. And therefore, he remains in the Father's love.

So it's a sort of remaining thing. It's not a legal contract thing. But there is a responsiveness to it that Jesus does obey.

Obey. So I'm trying to explain this. Perhaps it doesn't need explaining. But do we find that offensive?

No. In fact, it's rather beautiful, isn't it? It's what this ideal, eternal Father-Son relationship is like. The Son is confident of the Father's love and walks in the Father's love, which means walking in obedience to the Father.

[19:03] And if it's not problematic for Jesus, then hopefully we might have some sense that it needn't be problematic for us. Okay, so let's...

Yeah. When you say, if there is true love, there cannot be legalism. Well, that's an interesting thought, isn't it? Where there is true love, there cannot be legalism.

The love isn't consequent upon obedience. The love is there. Yes. And it causes the obedience, in a sense.

It's the source of the obedience because the Son only experiences that love as he obeys.

Yes. The one who loves him. Yes. That's kind of bound to happen in the case of the Father and the Son, but it's not bound to happen between the Lord Jesus and us.

[20:02] It's more problematic with the Lord Jesus and us, isn't it? It is bound to happen, I suppose, but it's... It gets... What I would point us to is chapter 10, verse 17.

So chapter 10, verse 17 says...

This is Jesus referring to himself as the good shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it again.

Now, that's an interesting verse, isn't it? Because I don't think it contradicts anything that we've said, but it does reinforce that idea that the Father not only has a givenness of love towards Jesus, but has a responsiveness of a love as well.

That as Jesus goes forward in each successive act of obedience, the Father says, isn't he wonderful? Isn't he brilliant? Look at what he's doing this time. That's tremendous.

[21:08] And you will have got something of that if you have children who've ever graduated or something like that or won a cycling proficiency test.

And you love your child anyway, but when they go up on the podium and get clapped, you think, aren't they great? I love them even... Well, I don't say love them even more. I love them again. I love them in this context. So, it's not... As we come to this, we might find it problematic, but actually it doesn't have to...

It can be just extremely beautiful. And that's the way it is with the Father and the Son. So, let's move on to this next question. Do we have a problem with Jesus commanding?

Because time and again he says, my commandments. So, I'm just sort of... I'm trying to draw out the question.

[22:09] If Jesus commands us, is this a betrayal... Whoops... Of the whole idea of grace? Or what?

Grace. And his love for us and our love for him. How do those fit together? Anybody want to comment on that?

Yes. Our commands of Christ, they're not the grounds of our justification. They're not the grounds of us being made right with God.

Their commands to do with how we remain in Christ. And it's more to do with our walk in holiness and sanctification. So, he's not saying do this and as a result of doing this, you will be made right with God.

You are right with God. You will justify it. You'll declare righteous. Therefore, I command you to live out these commands. Does it mean to maintain that closeness and sincere hope?

[23:14] Thank you very much. I'll just stop and... You said not the grounds of our justification. Probably worth just explaining that. So, justification is when God sees a sinner and says, as far as I'm concerned, you're perfectly righteous.

I've got no charges to bring against you. You're free. I'm on your side. You're adopted in my family. And we think, why would God think that?

Because I'm a sinner. But that's being justified. And we are justified not because of works that we have done. So, God brings us into that place of justification, that place of grace.

So, I just wanted to say that bit because that was your first, your opening sentence. But because we are so incomplete and stupid, we actually need his commands.

Otherwise, we don't know how to love him or how to demonstrate that we love him. Mm-hmm. Yes. Although we wouldn't say that Jesus was deficient in needing the Father's commands.

[24:22] But nevertheless, yeah, we... In a kind of way, as Jesus the man, God man, he did in his manness.

Yeah. I mean, I think we would say that the mode in which God the Father operates, even in creation, is to do so through the Son.

So, there is a sense that the Son fits in with the Father's will. That's the way anything is done by the Trinity. There's always a compliance from the Son to the will of the Father.

Yes. It was saying that Jesus is the captain, you know, the captain of the church. And so, by, in that way of demanding, he's not commanding to say, if you don't do this, you will not save you from that. He's saying, this is how we need to go forward. This is what's going to, this is what's going to, if you like, help you to remain in the kingdom of heaven.

[25:30] And even though we're not there now, we are there. You know, this is going to help you to do that. And this is the way forward now. This is what you need to do.

He's sort of commanding in that. Yep. Yes, it isn't a, it's not a, yeah, I think that's right. It's not threatening.

I mean, he is, he is rightly called the Lord Jesus, isn't he? Yeah. So, the way you relate to someone who is your Lord is to serve them. He's a teacher. He's a teacher.

And the way to relate to a teacher is to listen and to, and to follow the teachings. So, I don't think we can get this, we can't, it would be very foolish to try and remove that thought from Christianity.

If it's the Lord Jesus Christ, he is Lord. And the songs that we were singing actually were expressing that, weren't they? But do you notice the way they were expressing it is that he has so much loved us that we, not in a forced way, but in a very, if you like, natural way, very sweet way, say, if you've done this for me, I offer my life to you unreservedly.

[26:45] I am your servant. Do whatever you say, I will do it. And that, it's not a sort of forced thing, but a sweet, just how else would it ever be sort of thing.

Does that make sense? Yeah. Yeah. And when you're doing that, you lay down your life to the Lord, you don't lay down your life to the Lord.

But it is, for me, it is about what you did as well, but it's also about knowing that the gift you received back as well is just immeasurable.

And so you could come humble because it is so beautiful. So it is start to sacrifice because you say, yeah, I'm going to do it.

Yeah, I'm going to do it. I will. But it gives so much back. Yes. And then it doesn't actually become a, I've lost all my life and now I've got this burden of Christ.

[27:50] You know, it becomes, it gives so much back. When you've given it. Yes. There's some sort of remarkable sort of circles, aren't there, of he loved us, we love him.

And then the text keeps saying that if you walk in that way, you find his love for you and you're abiding in his love. So at first thought you might think, oh, I don't really like this.

But actually there's something rather beautiful and unthreatening about it and very becoming and inviting. Let's look at this question here. So it's, what is it that Jesus commands?

And there's one very simple answer to this. So he refers to his commands in the plural. But he does tell us what he means by that.

Can anybody tease that out? Love one another. Are we sure? Does it say that? Where does it say that? Where does it say that?

[29:04] All right. So Rod said 15, 15, 17. 15, 17. This is my command. Has anybody got a different?

Steve, what does yours say at that point? 15, 17. 15, 17. These things I command. They love one another. These?

These things. These things I command. Yes, plural. These things I command. But the these things is one thing, isn't it? Love one another. Is that right? Is that what your translation says?

These things I command. Love one another. Is that right, Steve? But he's talking about bearing fruit. And fruit is certainly various different manifestations.

So these things. Can you say that love is one thing? It's the fruit of the spirit. But it's love, joy, peace, and presence. Yeah, yeah. The first thing I mean is love is.

[30:00] And he just uses so many different ways to describe what love is. So these things are the whole package of loving, all that it contains. Yes. Yes. It means a whole lot. Yeah.

It can be some of the things like that, but it's so fun. Yes. Thank you for that. If you look in John's Gospel for the sort of guide principles of the Christian life, it really just boils down to one thing. Love one another. But it's a lot that gets boiled down into that. That spreads out in all sorts of ways. How's the Greek gospel voice love? We'll be there for a man now.

In that case, I won't do that. But yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Love is a whole lot of things. But I do think that Jesus says, if you were to say to the text, what is it that Jesus is commanding?

So verse 13, 34. A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. So he does repeat that.

[31:04] And I think we could take that as being the case. What is he commanding? He keeps on saying, if you love me, you will obey my commands. What is he commanding? The sort of source command of the whole thing is love one another.

Does that also connect slightly with elsewhere? He says that the son of the law is to love God. Yeah. To love one another. And the connection between commandments and the law.

And it sets in, because in his humanity, he had to fulfill the requirements of the law in order for us to be saved. So there's no connection between love and command and the law.

There is. I mean, when he was asked to summarize the law, he says the summary is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself. So that was my next question. Is this like or unlike the Old Testament? So is he just saying, well, all the Old Testament said, I'm just going to say that again and that's it.

[32:05] Is that what he says? I mean, in the text, what does he? He did come to fulfill the law.

Yeah. I mean, I would say that Jesus more than fulfilled the law, that he went a step more than the law ever commanded.

When he died on the cross, he fulfilled the law and some more. So. This is true.

This is true. Yes. Let me direct us to this question. So look at 1334. 34 and 35.

From the form of words there, would we say that Jesus is merely repeating something that has already been said in the Old Testament, for example?

[33:13] Is it merely a repetition? Does Jesus say, allow me to repeat what has always been said? A new command. A new command. Yeah. And could you see anything new about it?

Can I interject here, Phil? The lady who read this passage to us this morning. Yes. Read that verse as saying, a new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you.

So you must love one another. Oh. As if to say, in this way you must love one another. That was how she read it this morning, and I thought, wow. Right, Julia.

She's just there. I mean, it seems to me that the new thing, it does say new, doesn't it? Yeah. And then in another place it says a new command, which is actually an old commandment.

But there is a newness about it, and I think it is, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. And Jesus loved us by dying on the cross. That's a new thing.

[34:17] Yeah. There's nobody in the Old Testament who dies on the cross for us. So this is a new thing, and there's a newness about this command. It's not, I mean, what I said is not really any different.

It's just that it puts it in a slightly different order. It says, love one another as I have loved you. Yes. Well, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. Yeah, yeah. It's kind of the same thing. Yeah, yes, yeah.

But it preserves the dynamic of the radicalness, the newness of what Jesus has done, which is a sort of amazingness thing.

And now we're to love one another. So let's try and draw to a conclusion here. So here's the question. What is the route to knowing more of Jesus' love, to his showing more of himself to us, and having the presence of the Father and the Son?

So I think we could say there's a logical order to this. And I think it goes something like this. First is Jesus' love for us.

[35:28] And what's the measure of Jesus' love for us? How would... No, I don't mean that. I mean, how can we tell how much he loves us?

Okay, as the Father loved him, so he loves us. And then we could say, he lays down his life for the sheep, that sort of thing.

So that's a big starting point. Jesus... Oh, sorry. My screen doesn't quite... Jesus' love for us.

And then, what response do we have to his love for us? Obedience. Obedience.

Yeah. So I think we love him. If any man loves me, he will obey my commands. And what's the command?

[36:25] To love one another. So I've almost got no room to put this. So this bit says, love one another. Ooh. I'm going to try and write, love one another there.

One, another. Yeah. I've just managed to squeeze that in. Does it show up? Love one another. And if we love one another, what does Jesus promise is what follows on from that?

We will know the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And we will know his love within us.

And we will know the presence of Jesus Christ. Now then, how was I going to finish this? I can't remember. I was going to try and make a complete circle, but it doesn't really make much sense, does it?

So all of these things, the presence of the Father and the Son, him showing more of himself to us, us knowing more of Jesus' love.

[37:37] And I think there's a rather counterintuitive logic here, which says, if you want to know more of the love of Jesus, rather than hiding away in a monastery and just meditating or something like that, the way to know more of the love of Jesus is to obey his commands.

And what's his command? Is to love one another. So come to church. Come to the church lunch. Help with the washing up. Tidy up afterwards. Volunteer to take somebody home.

Pray with them and for them. Love one another. And if you're doing that, says Jesus, I will show you my love. I will be present to you. The Father and the Son will abide with you.

And that's, I think it's totally beautiful. It's a little bit counterintuitive because you'd think I should be looking at the Lord. But he, I think he's saying, if you love me, you love my brothers and sisters.

And if you love my brothers and sisters, that's where I'm to be found and my love's to be found. And I will show myself to you. Yeah, let's stop there.

[38:57] Let's stop there.