

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ 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.” (John 14:15-21)

Why Do We Obey?

Have you ever thought about why your children obey you? I’m assuming, of course, that they do obey you. But why? Is it because they know that if they don’t, they gonna get the back of your hand? Or a time out? Or lose their phone or their ipod or their tablet? Or are they just in the habit of obeying you because they’ve been doing it all their lives? Or do you carefully explain to them why it’s a good idea for them to do what you want them to and then persuade them to obey you? I’ve been a parent long enough to know that there are elements of all those things in our parenting. But none of them should be the most important reason why our children obey us. In the end, we want our children to trust the love that we’ve shown them since they were conceived and to do what we ask. We want them to see that as giving glory to God who gave them parents as his representatives. Now, today, I’m not really planning on a sermon on the 4th Commandment. Rather, my point is that children aren’t the only ones who have to obey. We adults do, too. All people have other people in authority over them. But even that isn’t my real point: God calls us to obey him. That really is what Jesus is talking about in the gospel lesson we have before us today. He speaks of those who obey his commands. We want to use his words to consider why. **Why do we obey?**

I.

Jesus says, **“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”** With these words, he rules out looking over our shoulders to see if God is about to give us the back of his hand. One summer when I was at the seminary, I worked in a home for people who were developmentally disabled in the recreation therapy department. They hired a whole bunch of college students to do things with the residents. A bunch of those kids just hid out in the break room and slept or screwed around for hours at a time. But if someone yelled, “The boss is coming!” They jumped up and suddenly did their jobs. Why? They didn’t want to get fired. They obeyed out of fear. That is the easiest way that we can think of to inspire obedience.

But it has serious drawbacks. If someone thinks they can get away with disobedience, they’ll try. And some people will calculate whether the consequences of getting caught are worth it or not. Sometimes, they decide they are. Some people are just willful. They can trap their boss or even their parent in a battle of wills that finally becomes all about winning. I’m not saying that consequences are unimportant. They are an important tool in dealing with disobedience. So is persuasion and argument. But nothing can replace willing obedience.

That’s what Jesus is talking about. And he’s talking about it in our relationship with God. God knows what we’re doing all the time. So you never really get away with anything. But at the same time, God doesn’t strike you with lightning every time you step out of line. And God doesn’t try to guilt you into obeying him because you feel so bad if you don’t. God doesn’t even try to persuade us to obey him, although he does say that we’ll be better off if we do. Jesus says, **“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”** It finally comes down to love. By that, Jesus does not mean mushy emotions. Emotions often do motivate us. If your child loves ice cream, you might get them to be good for a couple of hours if you promise ice cream afterwards. If a young man is in love with a young woman, he might blow his whole week’s pay on a date with her. Emotions do matter. But the word Jesus uses here speaks more of commitment and attitude. He tells us that real love for God shows itself constantly in what we do. If we love him, we obey him.

This speaks to all those people out there who think that God accepts all people and if we really loved Jesus we would welcome homosexuals and stop making a big deal out of living together and just get over our fellowship principles and a whole host of other things that make people mad today. That’s not what Jesus

wants. He told us to obey God's law. He said that not a single letter of God's law will pass away until heaven and earth pass away. If we love Christ, we will live according to the law as God gave it in the Bible.

Doing that because we love him means we do it out of joy, not out of fear or guilt or a hope of being rewarded. So why do we love God? Because he has loved us. From the moment we were conceived, God has loved us. God managed our lives so that we would hear the gospel. For many of us, he made sure we landed in families where our parents got us baptized. They brought us to church and Sunday School and Lutheran Elementary School. God worked to make us his and he directed every step of our lives so that we would hear the good news of Jesus Christ and believe it and have eternal life.

God worked for us even before we were conceived. From eternity he chose us to believe. And from eternity, he chose to send Jesus into this world to save us. When the time was right, the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary. He grew up and lived a perfect life in our place. He faced every temptation that we face, and he never once gave in. He loved his Father and obeyed him from start to finish. That obedience is ours. In God's books, we have been perfect. When Jesus died on the cross, he suffered all that we deserve for all those times we did not love God enough to obey him. Jesus paid our death and our hell. Then he rose to tell us we are bought and paid for. There is nothing left for us to pay. God is satisfied.

Every time we hear that good news, God reaches into our hearts and fans the flame of our love. That flame bursts forth in our lives in acts of love and obedience. And God even rewards us for that obedience. Now, he wouldn't have to do that. He has every right to demand obedience from us. But Jesus says, **"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."** Doing what God tells us to do is our duty. We sin if we don't do it all, every day of our lives. When we do obey God, it's never perfect. We're still sinners and a perfect God could pick apart all that's wrong with our efforts. But because he loves us, God sees our weak and clumsy attempts to follow him as perfect. God sees them as if Jesus himself had done them. And then God rewards us as if he owed us something for what we are supposed to do. God gives us his love. He doesn't have to. But he does. Seeing that love of God can only increase our love for him and our efforts to live the way God calls us to. **Why do we obey? Because we love Christ.**

II.

Does that mean it will be easy to do all that God calls us to do? Not at all. That's one reason why we so often fall back on threats and consequences to make our children obey. They don't always seem like they want to be good. The sinful nature is strong in every one of us and it has to be drowned every day in repentance and faith. We have to fight against temptation and we have to be equipped to wage that war and we need to equip our children to wage war against their own temptation, too. Sometimes, it can seem like struggling against temptation is a very lonely road to walk in this world. How many people around us care about the things God calls us to? How many people would be amazed that we would even spend time worrying about some of the things we Christians wrestle with? How often don't people around us assume that we're "holier than thou" hypocrites if we follow what God says?

Jesus wants us to know that we are not walking this road alone. He says, **"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."** Jesus speaks of "another Counselor" because he was about to leave them. He spoke these words right after the words we heard last week. It was still Good Friday evening. Jesus knew that when this night ended, his time of walking and talking and teaching and living with his disciples would be over. They would see him again for a while after the resurrection. But never again in this life would they have the kind of "one on one" time that they had enjoyed for the last three years. He was calling them to be faithful to him even when they wouldn't see him anymore for years between his ascension and their deaths.

But he did not leave them alone. He sent the Holy Spirit to them on the day of Pentecost. He will be with us forever. Now, he doesn't come to us in tongues of fire like he did for them. He doesn't give us the gift of speaking in foreign languages that we never studied like he did on that day. But that's not really his greatest gift anyway. His greatest gift is to be in us, to strengthen our faith and build up our love, so that we can trust in our Savior and love and live for him and obey all that he commands. For that, he will live inside us forever.

The world can't see that. Nobody without faith can understand what the Holy Spirit is doing inside us, or even believe that he's really there. Again, God does not call us to look for miracles like speaking in tongues

or healing or any of those real gifts that he did give the early Church. He calls us to look for faith and comfort and strength. He calls us to trust in something that the unbelievers around us could never see or understand or value. We have the Holy Spirit living in us, renewing our faith, drawing us daily to live for Jesus, and reminding us every day of our lives that we are loved and forgiven and that we are going home to be with him.

Jesus goes even farther. He says, **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”** In Jesus’ world, being an orphan meant death by starvation, or becoming a slave, or being raised as an afterthought in the house of some friend or relative who probably didn’t really have enough to raise his own kids, so you came last. Being orphaned destroyed your life. But Jesus promised not to leave us as spiritual orphans. Even though it is true that we don’t get to see him with our physical eyes, we do see him by faith. Unbelievers don’t. It’s not uncommon for them to torment Christians in times of need and hurt by asking them where their God is. But we know that we don’t only see God in the good that he does for us. We even see him in the bad that he allows to happen to us, because we see him in the gospel. Christ comes to us every time he promises to take our sins away. Christ comes to us every time he promises us a new and better life with him. Christ comes to us in the word and in the sacrament, and he renews our faith. We see him. We understand that he rose from the dead and that means that we will rise and live. No matter how much we lose here, no matter how much life hurts here, no matter how sad or broken or alone we feel, our Savior is with us and we will triumph in the end with him.

Jesus says, **“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”** In Christ, we are in the Father and the Father is in us. Every day that we are here, God embraces us with his love and he works for us. When we see that, it changes us. All this love from God makes us want to love him back. We love him by keeping his commandments. **Why do we obey? Because we are not alone.**

You will never be alone, not even here on this earth. Jesus is always walking with you, the Holy Spirit is always living in your heart, God the Father always embraces you with his love and care. We trust the love that God has shown us since before we were born. God has loved you. Love him back. Obey what he commands. Amen.