

# Do You Love Me Then Keep My Commandments

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's sermon is titled "Do You Love Me?"

During Holy Week, on Maundy Thursday, I preached a sermon titled "What is Love?" The topic was love from man to fellow man. Today's topic is once again love, though there are other items that I will discuss at great length in conjunction with it—mainly soteriology and sanctification— but more on them later. Now rather than just expounding on love to each other again, I will be going over love from man to God. Our love for God and to God is a different ballgame compared to every other type of love. It is radically different for many reasons, and let's start by exploring why that is.

First of all, whereas all men are equal to each other, on a level playing field so to speak, the gulf between man and God is so vast as to be insurmountable (with one exception that I am sure each and every one of you can guess). God, our Creator who is outside of space and time for He alone created both of them, is so unlike us that He is incomprehensible to us. And I mean that in a technical sense. If you've ever taken something mechanical apart and put it back together, you comprehend how it works and how it functions. You can see what part drives that part which moves this part and so on. But this is not the case with God. We know what God does, the Bible clearly tells us many things that He does, has done, or will do, and often in great detail. But we are left without a clear how. In the opening verses of Genesis, God's Spirit hovered over the waters and then He spoke and suddenly there was created existence. By what mechanism or mechanisms did God do that? I cannot tell you, nor do I think any man could rightly do so (and I think [Deut. 29:29](#) "The secret things belong to the Lord our God. . ." would agree with that conclusion). In fact, mankind is so much less than God, it is a miracle that God even takes notice of us, let alone loves us enough to die on the cross for us. We can ask together in amazement with the psalmist in [Psalm 8:3-4](#) "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" Where God is perfect,

man is miserably imperfect.

As if this difference didn't make things complicated enough, there's also a stark dissimilarity in the type of relationship we have between us and each other and between us and God. While our lives in the 21st century are very interconnected with various and complicated interdependencies for our modern conveniences, we are not literally dependent on one another for our continued existence. We are, however, totally, and wholly dependent on God for our existence, and it is only by His good pleasure that we draw breath. The Bible tells us He knitted us together in our mother's wombs, and that He chose us before He had even begun creation. And Paul says as much when he preaches to the Athenians in our Acts reading, [Acts 17:24-25](#): "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." Note that phrase there, "He Himself gives to all mankind *life* and *breath* and **everything**." This overwhelming dependency on God frames our love towards Him in way that is unlike any other relationship we have.

And with those two things in mind, we have our third point: Because we are so vastly inferior (and different) than God, and because our entire existence is contingent on His good will, we are obligated to render to Him our all and to obey Him at all times. Once again, this is not part of any love we have our fellow mortals, but rather this is a unique aspect of our love towards God. A parent has a right over the child, of course, but it is not absolute. A pet owner has a right over the pet, surely, but likewise it is not absolute. But God has the absolute right over each and every one of us, including all of the rest of His creation as well. Paul, that man God blessed with such great wisdom, explains God's sovereignty over man in [Romans 9](#). He compares us to clay which God uses for His purposes, and he asks rhetorically "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'"

On the face of things, we are in a tight spot. We owe such services as we cannot rightly provide to someone whom we owe everything to and on whom we depend for everything. This brings us to our Gospel reading. Verse 15, Jesus says

to His followers that “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Now, we don’t need a show of hands here, but I’ll confess at least that I know I have not kept His commandments. I have not loved the Lord our God with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind and with all my strength. Nor have I loved my neighbor as myself. Each day that goes by there are things I am called to do which I leave by the wayside and things I am called to not do that I preoccupy myself with. Without any other qualifiers or extenuating circumstances, one might be tempted to say I am at risk on that day where all men are judged of hearing Jesus say to me those dreaded words, “I never knew you; depart from me, you worker of lawlessness.”

But, of course, let us not forget these words of assurance from [1 John 2:1](#) “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” When God looks upon us, He doesn’t see our ugly and damning sins, but rather the perfect righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Why? John follows up with the bold declaration, [1 John 2:2](#), “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Peter echoes this in our Epistle reading today, saying in [1 Peter 3:18](#) “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” So, though I fail in keep perfectly those Holy and Right commands, Christ’s obedience and righteousness is imparted to me. He is how that vast gulf between Creator and creature is bridged. God reaches out through Christ to us and brings us to Himself. Now, however, I hear some wheels turning in your heads. If our salvation is bought by Christ and His actions and not ours, then why does He, among other figures in the New Testament, stress our personal obedience and actions? Just two verses later in that passage from 1 John, John says in verse 4, “Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Which is it? Does our work and obedience determine our salvation or does our faith in Christ pay for every shortfall and moral failing?

The subject I am getting at is known as “soteriology” or the study of salvation. Its name comes from the Greek word for salvation that I cannot pronounce. If you take only one thing away from this sermon today, let it be this: our salvation comes from our faith in Christ and His atoning death on the cross. It is

irrespective of the works we do or do not do. Martin Luther was tireless in stressing that salvation comes to us from our faith alone, *sola fide*. It is from our salvation, actually, that our obedience originates and, yea, grows. This is the other term I prefaced this theologically heavy sermon with, sanctification. Our readings today speak loudly about this life-long process. In [1 Peter 3:21](#), Peter explains it as it connects to baptism, “Baptism, which corresponds to this [the ark which saved Noah and his family], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The operative phrase there is the “appeal to God for a good conscience” which we get in baptism through Christ’s resurrection. When we place our faith in Christ and either get baptized or baptize an infant on their behalf, we are calling out to God to have mercy and correct us when and where we err and to lead us to walk in the faith. And who works this change inside of us? None other than the Holy Spirit. This brings us back again to the Gospel reading today. Jesus promised His followers that the Holy Spirit would come to them, to us. Jesus describes Him as the Helper, and a helper He most certainly is. When a Christian manages to cast off another sinful clinging part of that old man, the old self, the credit goes to the Holy Spirit. Paul lists in [Galatians 5:22](#) that the fruit of the Holy Spirit includes “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness.”

This is great news for all the faithful in Christ, but where does this leave us with loving God? As we have read and discussed, if you love Him, you will keep His commandments and do His will. Now, let me clarify. This is not to be read so woodenly that anyone who has a sin that they can’t shake, or someone who has lack of some of the Christian virtues, or even someone who has a season of backsliding is to be excluded and assumed lost to that place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. But rather it is an invitation to work with God and in His ineffable plans for creation. In [Ephesians 2:10](#) Paul states, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” God has good works ready for each and every single one of us. He made them specifically so that we make walk in them. And Paul makes it clear these works, and whether or not we actually take God up on the offer, does not affect the binary state that is our salvation. [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may

boast.” So, while those works won’t save you or damn you, they’re still incredibly special and meaningful to our Creator. And He knows that left to our devices we wouldn’t be able to do anything good. And we know of this weakness too, Paul reminds us of in [Romans 7:18](#), “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” So, God gives to each of us the Holy Spirit to work inside of us and to sanctify us and to enable us, bit by bit, day by day, to perform those things which are pleasing to Him.

Now please remember, sanctification is a lifelong process. We won’t see the final fruits of the work of the Spirit until we stand before Christ. If there are still aspects of the Christian life you are struggling with, it doesn’t mean you’re a reprobate or that you don’t love God or Jesus. It means you’re still here with the rest of us sinners. If you love Jesus and try, with the help of the Helper, to follow His commandments, then if your successes and failures were graphed over time, you would see a positive trend toward more acts of faithfulness and obedience than not. Again, I stress, this doesn’t mean you won’t have bad days or even a time of great struggle with your obedience, but on average you’ll be obeying more and more. These actions of faithfulness are mostly self-evident, but I will enumerate some of them to round of my point. On one hand, you have the pious inactions. This is, simply, not giving into sin. We are tempted every day by the Devil and his angels. They whisper in our ears to do this or that, and it is an act of love to rebuke and ignore their whispers and stay faithful to God. Then you have, of course, specific and individual actions that God has placed for you to resolve. You’ll find yourself at the right place at the right time and just so happen to be rightly equipped. It is an action of love to God to play your part cheerfully. Lastly, you can’t forget the simple and routine things: reading your Bible every day, praying constantly about all things, going to church regardless of how tired you may be, and being a daily witness to Christ. Every time you do even one of the smallest of these actions, you are actively loving and honoring God. And as you continue to walk in faith with Christ, these works will become more plentiful and more fruitful. I close with Jesus’ words from [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.”

Let us pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all of the faithful in Christ and for the help and honor of performing the will of our Father who is in Heaven.

Amen and amen.