

The God who loves relationships

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Date: 11 December 2016

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to show you something this morning. Can you all see that? This here is our home computer. I'm very proud of it because I built this from scratch, from spare parts that I picked up on Gumtree and second-hand stores.

As you can see, it's a beautiful specimen of modern technology. But I brought it along to make a point this morning. And the point is this. When I made this computer, I didn't just buy all these spare parts and decide to plug in these wires wherever I felt like it.

Right? Because then it would have been a disaster. Each wire and cable and memory chip in this computer has a specific place to go. And for this computer to work properly, I needed to know where those cables and memory chips and stuff went.

And unless I wired everything according to the instructions of the designer of the motherboard, which is kind of the main center of this computer, unless I did that, the computer wouldn't have worked.

Or worse, it would have blown up. When I tried to switch it on. And if I switched it on and something still wasn't working properly, I would go back, go back to the instructions, read it and reread it and reread it until I got it right.

[1 : 0 6] And I'm glad to say that I did that. The computer didn't blow up. And it's working today because I obeyed the instructions of the designer of this to the letter. But here's my point.

Why did I bring this along? Why did I make this point? Well, why, if this is the case of the computer, why do we find it so difficult to obey as carefully the instructions of the designer of life itself?

Think about it. Why do we not read our Bibles as studiously and as intricately and carefully as I read those computer instructions? If I wanted the computer to work.

You know, I didn't just leave the instructions on my shelf and maybe referred to them every so often. I read it cover to cover. So I knew what I was doing. So I didn't mess it up. So why don't we do that with the Bible?

Why don't we treat the Bible in the same way? I mean, if this is the instructions of the designer of life, why don't we treat the Bible the same way? Now, for someone who's not a Christian, it might be that they haven't yet come to realize that this Bible is the Word of God.

[2 : 1 4] And if that's you this morning, then I encourage you to read it for yourself or just to keep coming to church to listen to it.

And eventually you will see that this is no ordinary human book. This is the Word from our Creator. You'll see that if you come and listen to it enough. But for someone who is a Christian, let's be honest with ourselves this morning.

Even though we know that the Bible is our instructions for life, we still struggle to obey it, don't we? Let's be honest.

We struggle to obey the Bible far more than I struggle to. I didn't struggle to obey those computer instructions. No, I obeyed them quite vigorously because I didn't want the computer to explode.

So why do we struggle to obey the Bible? Why do we find it so difficult to open the Bible, to read it, and to do what it says? That's the question I want us to consider this morning. Because obeying our Creator should be the most logical thing to do, shouldn't it?

[3 : 20] And yet we struggle. And I want to start by suggesting that there are only ever two possible motivations for obedience in this world, for someone to be obedient to someone or something else.

And the first of these motivations is fear. Fear of what will happen if you're not obedient. So fear is what caused me, in fact, to follow the instructions of the computer manual.

I feared what would happen if I didn't follow the instructions. I feared that all my money would be wasted and it would melt down or something. It's fear that causes us to obey the traffic department's road rules when we're driving our cars.

Not because we like the traffic department and we want to make them happy. That's not why we stop at stop streets and keep to the speed limits and drive on the left-hand side of the road. We do that simply because we fear the collision that might happen if we don't obey those instructions.

And so that's the first motivation for obedience, fear. But there's another motivation for obedience and that is love. You see, sometimes, every so often, someone obeys someone else when there is nothing to fear from disobeying.

[4 : 32] Why do they do it then? Well, simply because out of love, they desire to see the other person get what they want and so they follow their instructions. How much sugar would you like in your coffee? Well, two, please.

Now, do you go to the kitchen and obey that instruction out of fear of what the other person will do to you if you only put in one spoon? No, you do it out of love. You obey the person's instructions because you want to please them.

You want them to enjoy their coffee. And that's just an example of a different type of obedience. It's obedience out of love, not out of fear. Do you see the difference? And those are the really only two motivations that you can ever have to obey someone else.

And so what that means is that our struggle to obey God as human beings must lie in a failure to either fear him enough or to love him enough.

Now, religion typically plays the fear card, doesn't it? Think about it. It tells you, you know, if you go to any typical kind of religion or religious service, you'll definitely be told of all the bad things that will happen to you if you fail to obey.

[5 : 42] And the reason is, the reason why that's typically the motivation you're given to obey God is because it's much easier to get people to fear than to get people to love.

The famous Italian philosopher Machiavelli famously said, if you're to lead men, it is better to be feared than to be loved. Now, what's interesting is when we turn to John 14 and we read Jesus' words, is that Jesus doesn't do that at all.

Jesus doesn't take Machiavelli's advice. That's not his philosophy of leadership. Instead, Jesus walks the harder road of motivating his disciples to obey him out of love. Did you notice that?

Look at verse 15 again. This is why he says, if you love me, keep my commands. Now, he could have used the fear card. He was perfectly entitled.

He could have said, quite honestly, if you don't want to go to hell, keep my commands. But he didn't. He didn't use that tactic. Why? Why didn't he use that tactic?

[6 : 47] Well, here's why. He explains later on why he didn't play the fear card, why he rather plays the much harder love card. And that is in verse 24. Read it carefully. It's up on the screen as well.

Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. So no matter what other motivations they might have, whether out of duty or expectation from others or even fear of what might happen if they don't, people won't genuinely, willingly obey Jesus unless they really love him.

And that is what Jesus is teaching here. People won't obey him unless they really love him and neither will you. You won't ever genuinely, willingly obey Jesus unless you first really love him.

And just maybe the reason you struggle to obey and that you've been struggling all this time maybe is that you've had the wrong motivations all along. Maybe you're trying to obey Jesus because people expect you to.

Maybe a husband or a wife expects you to live the good life and obey the Bible and they drag you to church. Maybe you're trying to obey Jesus to avoid going to hell out of fear as an insurance policy.

[8 : 07] Maybe you're trying to obey Jesus just because you want to genuinely do the right thing. You want to be a decent person. Well, I want to tell you this morning that none of those is going to work. None of those motivations is going to work at the end of the day because Jesus says, verse 24, anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

No matter what other reason it might be for, the only way you'll truly obey Jesus in your life is if you truly love him. And that is what he is saying here, not me.

And so you've got to ask yourself the hard question. Do you truly love him? Do you love Jesus? Deep down, where no one else can see, can you honestly say that you love Jesus?

Well, to answer that, we need to understand just what it means to love Jesus, don't we? And that's the first real lesson I want us to see. What does it mean to love Jesus? Well, to understand that, the first thing we must do is actually get away from our Western culture's view of what loving someone means.

You know what I mean? It's often portrayed in movies, the idea that love is equivalent to feelings. You love someone as much as you feel for them.

[9 : 24] That it's all butterflies and fireworks, you know, romantic movies and Hollywood. Portray this as the kind of idea of what love is. But let me tell you, that's a very unhelpful view of love.

Because while those feelings, of course, may at times result out of love, they are not love itself. Love, according to the Bible, is much, much bigger than just butterflies and fireworks and happy, warm fuzzies.

Love is described in the Bible more as an orientation of the heart and the will towards something. Irrespective of how you might feel day to day. It's where your heart is heading.

It's where your heart is looking. Love is what your heart gravitates towards. You know what I mean? That's what love is. It's much deeper than feelings, you see? So what does our heart gravitate towards?

Well, because we're selfish beings, which we are, the Bible quite clearly says, we tend to gravitate towards and love the things and love the people that benefit us the most, don't we?

[10 : 30] We typically love being with a particular person because we derive something from them, some kind of benefit from them, a feeling of being appreciated, companionship, feeling of being loved, laughter, whatever it might be.

Let's be honest, right? Those of us who are married, let's just be honest. We were initially attracted to our spouses primarily because of what we could get from them.

Think about it. The feeling of intimacy that we craved, the feeling of being loved, someone who will always be there when you need it, someone to give you emotional security, all the things we need, we were attracted to someone because they can give these things to us.

I know it sounds selfish, and it is, but it's true, isn't it? And yet, I think we all know that's not all there is to it. If you've been married and you love your spouse, which I hope you do, you know that that's not all there is to the love you have for them, not just what they can give you.

There's something deeper there, isn't there? There's something deep down inside in a really close human relationship, a kind of love that goes beyond the benefits that we can receive from the person and a kind of love that stays there even after those benefits are cut off.

[11 : 48] It's the type of love an elderly husband has for a wife who is bedridden and not able to give him anything in return, and yet he still is at her bedside loving her. It's the type of love that Larissa Murphy had for her boyfriend, and in after he was involved in a head-on collision that left him mentally and physically disabled, and yet she still wanted to marry him, even though he could give very little to her in return.

It's a love that is so focused on the other that we forget ourselves. And it's a love that's described in the Bible with the Greek word agape. You may have heard it before.

It describes a divine, unconditional love, a love that we experience only because of being made in God's image. You know, often we suddenly find ourselves surprised that we love someone in this way, someone who we were originally attracted to because of their benefits they could give us.

Now we find we love irrespective of those benefits. We love them just for who they are with this agape love. It's a love that you can identify by sacrifice, a willingness to sacrifice our wants for those of another.

other. And that's the type of love Jesus is talking about here in John 14, which will motivate people to obey him. Agape love.

[13 : 11] A love that is more than just feelings, which, by the way, is good news for any feelings-averse South African males. You know what I mean?

South African males don't like to show their feelings. They don't like all these warm fuzzies. But don't worry, gents. You might not feel love for Jesus. You might not feel butterflies and fireworks all the time for Jesus, but that's not what he's talking about here.

You can breathe a sigh of relief. He's talking about a love for him that goes beyond feelings. So this love that I'm talking about, this love that goes beyond feelings, it's not just a love that goes beyond feelings as well.

It's a love that goes beyond even loving Jesus for what he can give us. Sure, we may have come to him, and many people do. In fact, I would say a majority of people come to Jesus initially because of the benefits he gives us, not least of all salvation and eternal life.

I mean, I'm sure most of us came to Jesus for that, but there's that moment when as Christians, as we learn about Jesus, as we grow closer to him, that we find ourselves loving him with a deeper love, irrespective of the benefits that he gives us, a love for just who he is.

[14 : 24] A desire to please him, an awe of this amazing God who made all this, that creation, all this beautiful creation is just a little, tiny reflection of his character.

And we learn to love him just because of who he is, just because he's perfect, and he's the only perfect thing we have in this world. This world is broken, and we're surrounded, we're broken, we're surrounded by imperfection and brokenness, and then we discover this perfect being, our God, our creator, who is the source of all good things, and we love him not just for what he can give us, but we love him because of who he is.

Even if that means sacrificing for him. You see, because sacrifice is the mark of this love, this kind of agape love. It's the kind of love that led St. Mark's congregation last week to sacrifice their personal money to buy the property next door so that we can do what Jesus wants in the years to come.

Because that is in fact the kind of love that Jesus has for us, and we recognize that as a church. That's the kind of love Jesus has for us, his people, his bride.

He loves us with an agape love that caused him to come to earth and sacrifice his life to save us, bad as we were, as our brother Paul said earlier.

[15 : 49] You know, his son came to that realization, I'm a bad person, daddy. Paul says, well, so am I, son, and we all are, and yet Jesus loves us with that agape love, irrespective of our badness, and apart from any benefit we could give Jesus, he still loves us.

He came to show us what agape love is. He came to bring that love into the world, and it's once a person has experienced that in the gospel, and they've come to believe that and put their trust in Jesus, that's when we are able to start loving him back in the same way.

It's like a beautiful, contagious virus, this agape love. You know, when we come and experience it from Jesus, we catch it, and we pass it on to others.

1 John 4.19 says, we love because he first loved us. That's where we got this love from, this ability to love with an agape love. And what that means as well is that you can only love Jesus in this way that he's talking about if you believe the gospel.

Because unless you believe the gospel truly in your heart of hearts, you won't have experienced this unconditional love from your creator. Unless you've tasted this agape love from Jesus.

[17 : 02] And when you do, then you really can't not love him in return. And so whether you love Jesus or not is an indicator of whether you've tasted his love, whether you've truly embraced the gospel for yourself.

And so that's what it means to love Jesus. And how we come to love Jesus. But what does this love for Jesus actually look like in a believer's life?

And that's the second thing I want us to consider this morning. What happens when you love Jesus? Well, Jesus teaches us here two things at least. Firstly, you obey him.

According to Jesus, this is the proof that someone has come to love him genuinely. They obey him. Verse 15, if you love me, keep my commands. Now the original actually says something slightly different.

It says, if you love me, you will keep my commands. It's a slight difference. But the point is, it's not an order in the original. It's not a command. It's an observation. You know, Jesus is saying obedience is the natural response to truly loving him.

[18 : 08] Which makes sense, doesn't it? If we really love him, we'll want to please him if we truly love him. We'll be thinking about what he wants. And we'll want to do that and give that to him.

We'll want what he wants. We'll obey him irrespective of whether we'd be punished for not obeying. We just obey him because we love him. And this is the key to Christian obedience, let me tell you. We're called to resist sin in our lives.

But not because sin will send us to hell as Christians. It won't. Jesus has taken those sins on the cross already. So why should we carry on resisting the sins in our lives? Well, because our sin grieves Jesus whom we love and that should be enough to cause us to fight it with every ounce of our being.

Are you attracted to a particular sin? Don't lie. Yes, you are. So am I. We all are. We all have our own battles, our own particular sins that we're fighting in our lives. You know it's wrong, but it's just so pleasing and nobody knows about it.

And besides, you're a Christian, you believe in Jesus and so you're safe from punishment. Well, the only way that you'll stop doing that sin is by loving Jesus more.

[19 : 20] By having a stronger affection for him that outweighs your love for that sin. And that's why only those who truly love him can truly obey him.

But that doesn't mean that when we love Jesus we'll obey him perfectly. No, none of us can. But it does mean that if we truly love him, it means that when we do trip up in sin, which we do, our reaction will be that we hate that.

We hate it. We're grieved by it as much as Jesus is grieved by it. And we confess it, which we do here in church every Sunday. And we resolve to turn away from it.

And we search the scriptures to learn how we can please Jesus better. That's our reaction to our sin if we love Jesus. And that's why we come to church.

And that's why, as I said, we confess our sins. And that's why we hear from Jesus. Because we love him. That should be your motivation to coming for church, by the way. Not because your pastor tells you to.

[20 : 23] But because you love Jesus. And you want to please him. And you want to learn how to please him more. And you want to learn about him more because you love him. And so that's the first major thing that happens when you love Jesus.

You obey him. But the second that he teaches here is that you receive his Holy Spirit. Look at verse 15 onwards again. He says, If you love me, keep my commands.

And I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and 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.

Okay, so this is a huge encouragement because not only does Jesus say that those who love him will obey him, but also he says that he will give those people help to obey him.

Which is an encouragement at least for me. You know, if we read Jesus' command to obey and I go, Oh man, it's so difficult. But you know what? Jesus says, I know, I know it's difficult and that's why I'm going to send you some help.

[21 : 28] In the person of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity will come and dwell inside and amongst his people to enable us to do what Jesus commands.

To enable us to do things we couldn't do before. But you know what? That's not all the Holy Spirit does. He also teaches us to recognize what is true in a world full of lies and a world full of contradictory voices.

The Holy Spirit helps us to cut through all the rubbish and to determine what is true about life and death and judgment and eternity. That's why he's called the Spirit of Truth, you'll notice.

Which means that the only way to know what is really true about this world is not through science, helpful as that is. Science won't tell you what is really true at the heart of this world and why we're here.

It can't answer those questions. And it's not through horoscopes that you're going to learn the truth, which I heard on the radio just, it's absolutely rubbish.

[22 : 32] It's just, it's all made up stuff that could apply to anyone in any situation. But it's funny that they're happy to talk about horoscopes on the radio but they'll never talk about Christianity. No, you're not allowed to do that.

People think they'll find truth in horoscopes. People find they'll, people think they'll find truth in meditations, special meditations that you do, special kind of breathing or pilgrimage to Tibet or wherever it is.

You know, people think they'll find truth, everybody's seeking truth but no, none of that is going to help you to find truth. The only way to find truth is to have the spirit of truth dwelling inside you and his word, the Bible, open in front of you because the Bible is the sword of the spirit, the Bible itself says.

The Bible is the instrument that the spirit uses to guide us to truth and to change us and to guide us towards Jesus and to teach us how to love him more.

And so if you have the Bible closed then the sword cannot be used. The spirit won't work. He works through the Bible. But then there's one final thing that the Holy Spirit does for us that Jesus talks about here and it's an incredible thing that the Holy Spirit does for those who love Jesus.

[23 : 52] We see it in verse 23. Have a look. Jesus replied, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching, my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.

So you see, when the Holy Spirit comes into a person's life, He makes it possible for that person to have an intimate personal relationship with God, the creator of the universe.

Intimately. Closer than any human relationship you could have. Doesn't that blow you away? Isn't that incredible? Effectively, what the Holy Spirit does, you know, Jesus calls about, talks about making a home in you.

So what the Holy Spirit does is that He clears the way for Jesus and His Father to come in and make a home. He's like an estate agent of our hearts, you know? He makes sure that your heart is ready for its new occupant, which is God Himself living with you.

He clears away all the cobwebs and He takes away all the broken stuff and He clears up all the cracks in the walls and He paints everything so that it's ready for God, God to come and live in you.

[25 : 16] Not just with you, not just, you know, living in the spare room of your house, no, living in you, closer than anyone else, every minute of every day for the rest of your life and eternity.

And all that happens when you believe the gospel and come to love Jesus. When you taste the agape love of Jesus as He displayed when He died on the cross for us and you love Him in return, which is the only response for someone who truly believes the gospel.

And it's then that not only do you want to follow the designer's instructions for your life, but you can because you have His Spirit living in you. And so in closing, if you're not a Christian this morning, I hope you see why you should be.

I hope it's clear to you or a little clearer. God made you. You've been designed. And so in obeying the designer's instructions are vital for your life, absolutely vital.

Here and in eternity, if you want your life to work, if you don't want it to implode on itself, you have to. It's logical. It's the only thing to obey the instructions of the designer which are here in His Word.

[26 : 41] But, it's only through loving Jesus that you will be able to do that. You will be able to obey. It's only through Him taking your sins and giving you His Holy Spirit that you will be equipped and enabled to obey these instructions.

Christians. And if you are a Christian, then be encouraged. Be encouraged by the knowledge that you have God's Spirit inside you.

And let that Spirit work to help you to love Jesus more each day as you open the Bible, as you come to church, as you hear His voice calling you to obey Him willingly and joyfully.

Do not quench the Spirit. Keep in step with the Spirit. And always let the sword of the Spirit cut deep inside you and change you to become the person your Creator intends for you to be.

Let's pray. Lord God, we do worship you and thank you for your beautiful, intricate design of this creation and of life and of us.

[27 : 54] We're sorry that we've messed it up. We're sorry that we've broken it. We thank you that you have a new creation planned and we thank you that through Jesus we can be part of that.

Help us, Lord, to trust in Jesus and to love Him more each day. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we might follow your commands and be joyful and happy to do that.

And we pray these things all through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.