Matthew 28: 16-20

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Introduction

Obedience is also a commandment. We often hear people talk about the grace of God but we seldom hear the same earnest discussions on obedience. Yet the same man who is grace to all men, also said “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14: 15).

Try an experiment with a group of three year olds. Offer each a bowl of ice cream and a bowl of boiled spinach. In fact, make the spinach bowl twice as large as the ice cream. Regardless of what Popeye said, and regardless of how many of us thought it must be great, no self-respecting three year old would ever prefer the spinach. Most of the time, the offer of the “cooked grass” will be met with a variant of “YECH” and a scrunched-up face that would be right at home on a bottle of poison. The truth is, the spinach is better for us than the ice cream, but try telling that to three year old or even most thirty year olds, for that matter. And so it frequently is with obeying the command of God and Jesus. Notice how many terribly negative things in life would be eliminated if people obeyed Jesus’ teachings. Racism would disappear. There would be no hunger. Adulterous relationships would cease. Marriages would be healed and strengthened. Families would not be torn apart because of disharmony. Drive-by shootings would cease. Illicit drugs wouldn’t be needed. Yes, there would still be problems in the world, but there would no longer be as many sin-problems in the world. All if we would just obey.

Study

By some accounts He had been dead for about a month, but there is no real way to know how long it had been…and yet His disciples were with Him here in this remote place listening to a dead man speak. These men who had been with Him since the beginning were the same men He had poured His life and teaching into. Only one had chosen another direction. Now, He was finally leaving them for good. So what final teaching
would He leave? What final thoughts would He impart? In the time He had been with them, He had taught them that the ordinary was quite extraordinary; that life was meaningless in the pursuit of temporary gain; that long held expectations were wrong; that relationships could only be saved when God is at their center; family was not who we think it is; love is different. Rather, He taught about the lowly, the poor in spirit, the merciful, the angry, the deceived, and the Deceiver. He had been victimized by liars and traitors. He had been murdered but He said “Father forgive them”. What more was there to say? And now He was here on a remote mountainside preparing to depart. If this seems reminiscent of an earlier time, it should. These same men had been with Him on the same or a similar mountainside some three years earlier. They had been amazed at what He had taught them because He had taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (Matthew 8: 28-29). He could have said “teach them everything I have (taught) you” and been done with it but he actually said something unexpected. He told them in just a few words that they knew what to teach and to do but their new lifetime job was to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded you”. Three years of training boiled down into two imperatives in a span of only nine (9) words. But what words they were:

Obey: Jesus expected the men (and women) who had been with Him to remember the teaching. It had been different from anything they had ever heard before and now He knew they remembered it. But that wasn’t enough. He expected that, with His soon to occur departure that they would continue to live His words. There was no other way He would accept them and they knew it. His sacrifice had been great and their obedience had to be complete.

Command(ed): He wasn’t a leader of an army even though many of the assembled masses expected the Messiah to return in the manner of David; a military conqueror to restore the glory of Israel. Nevertheless, his words hold the same meaning and requirements as any general who ever stepped on the field of battle. Satan knew the meaning of what Jesus was saying. It was a word Satan had used when he reassured
Jesus that no harm would befall him because God would “command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully.” (Luke 4:10). God commands armies of angels and Jesus commanded His disciples about us. John 14:15 clearly links love, obedience, and keeping Jesus’ commands in one simple sentence of 34 letters with only ten word. Simple and succinct but so easy to overlook or ignore.

If you love me, you will obey what I command.

Quick Questions

1. How does the ancient concept “keeping” equate with the modern idea of “obey”?
2. Why does Jesus equate loving Him with obedience?
3. Is the idea of “loving” Jesus difficult for us?
4. In general, for an average non-Christian American, is “obeying my commandments” an impediment to becoming a Christian?

Application

The obedience He demands is a matter of salvation defining this obedience in very specific terms:

Jesus replied, “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. 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. (John 14:23-24)

In very straightforward terms Jesus says that those who do not love him will not keep his teaching. But as Paul notes, I don’t miss the mark because I want to but because there seems to be other “stuff” going on in my head at the same time (Romans 7:15ff, see below). And this isn’t even the whole story. This same Jesus, who spent so much time talking about the old commandments and how we should really be, also introduced a new command, the Eleventh, and it may be the most difficult one to live of them all.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34).

But why is following the Eleventh Commandment so hard? James, the brother of Jesus, may have the answer in all its simplicity:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:1-3)

The truth is I know you and I am not certain that I like you. That attitude and many more similar ones contribute to our inability to get along with one another. The situations are myriad but the simple summaries are always similar: “you make me mad”; “you got the job I wanted”; “you have the family and kids I want”; “I really like your car”. All of these statements in one way or another cast us against our brothers or sisters and betray a sense of jealousy, envy, or selfishness. Returning to the simple words of Jesus’s teaching is the only
way to remove ourselves from the constant battle of us against brother/sister and becoming one with God. 
Paul emphasized the connection between loving God and loving our brothers and sisters:

9Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 
10and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its 
Creator. Colossians 3:9-10

12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, 
kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances 
you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put 
on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12-14

14For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You 
suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15who 
killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all 
men. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15

12May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours 
does for you. 1 Thessalonians 3:12

Discussion

1. Why is it so hard to consider obedience as essential to salvation for some people?
2. What is the danger of linking obedience of commands to legalism? Give several examples and discuss 
your difficulties with each.
3. Consider the statements Jesus makes in John 14: 23-24. Compare it to the statement made in John 
13:34. What is hard about these statements to you?

References

My Time: (make a list of the important concepts you discussed today that you want to pray about and turn over to God this week)