John 14:15-16

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[0:00] If we love Jesus, in what ways should we behave?

It's a good question, and it's a question that I hope lots of you moms and dads will be discussing with your children over putting this lunchtime.
But it is, of course, a question that concerns us all. And who is best placed to answer the question? If we love Jesus, in what ways should we behave?
Who could best answer that question? Well, Jesus. Jesus is best placed to give us the answer to that question, and he does.
He gives us the answer to our question. We read in John chapter 14 and verse 15, If you love me, you will obey what I command.
[1:09] If you love me, my commands you will obey. I guess that's it in a nutshell. Now, that is the answer, certainly at the heart of the answer to the question that has been posed.

It's a no-brainer. We don't need to give it deep, philosophical thought. The answer's there. How do we behave if we love Jesus?
Well, this is how we behave. We obey his commands. If we love Jesus, our behavior will be marked by obedience to Jesus.
It's so clear, you might say, well, we could just leave it there. And what if we did just leave it there? Well, perhaps some of you might feel a little short-changed.
Others of you might be quietly delighted. But we won't just leave it there. We'll think about this a little more deeply. Now, this verse, If you love me, you will obey what I command, is a verse I'm sure that I have referred to or quoted in conversation on numerous occasions.
[2:26] I imagine, in fact, I don't imagine. I know that I have referred to it and drawn it in when preaching on other subjects has been relevant, and so reference has been made to it.

But as far as I can recall, I've never sat down and given careful consideration to the verse. And that is something that I hope we will be able to do this morning.
And we'll be looking at the verse that has been quoted, verse 15. If you love me, you will obey what I command. But we'll also be looking at the verse that follows. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth.
These two verses will be the focus of our attention this morning. And we may make occasional reference to other verses in the passage that we've read.
Now, we'll divide what we have to say with the help of four headings. The first thing that we want to think about is the purpose that underpins Jesus' declaration.
[3:32] This declaration, if you love me, my commands you will obey. Let's think about the purpose that lies behind what Jesus says here. The next thing we're going to notice is the authority implicit in Jesus' declaration.

We'll come to that and explain what we mean by that in due course. Then we'll think about the obedience commended as a love gift to Jesus.
We're urged, we're commended to obey his commands. We want to think about that, but to think about it in these terms, that this constitutes a love gift from us to Jesus.
And then, fourthly, as we move into the second verse, or verse 16, we're going to think about the help promised by Jesus to those who love Jesus.
The help that is promised to us in this matter. So let's think about what Jesus says along those lines. First of all, the purpose that underpins Jesus' declaration.
[4:42] Why is it that Jesus, at this juncture, makes this declaration? What is his purpose? I'm trying to go beyond simply acknowledging that what Jesus says is true, we take that as a given, to asking why he says it to his disciples on this occasion, in these particular circumstances.

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Well, we've read the chapter, but let's remind ourselves how the chapter begins. At the very beginning of chapter 14, Jesus is addressing his disciples and he says, Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Do not let your hearts be troubled. Their hearts are troubled. He's not contemplating some future crisis. They are troubled.
And he's saying, Don't allow your hearts to be troubled. The disciples are distressed. They're overcome almost with sadness and apprehension and fear.
However, Jesus is going to leave them. And why is his imminent departure a source of distress and sadness to the disciples?
[5:55] Well, simply for this reason. They love Jesus. And because they love Jesus, the prospect of his departure overcomes them with sadness and fear.

If they didn't love Jesus, it would be a matter of relative indifference, his announced and imminent departure. So Jesus is leaving.
Well, hey, life goes on. We can always find another rabbi. But it's inconceivable that they would have thought in those ways. Why? Because they love Jesus. They love Jesus.
And this is important for us to have very much in our minds as we then see what Jesus says in our text. That he's speaking to those who do love him.
The manner that Jesus phrases his statement or his declaration, If you love me, my commands you will obey, I don't think is to be understood as introducing some element of doubt to the matter of whether they do or don't love Jesus.
[7:01] I think rather the idea is along the lines of, given that you love me as those who love me, what if we want to be more careful and retain the language and the sentiment of the words that we find?

We could keep the language, if you love Jesus or if you love me, but understand it as Jesus looking to provoke them into the response, Of course we love you.
Of course we love you. The point is that the very context in which Jesus speaks allows us to declare with great confidence that he is addressing in this audience before him, his own disciples, those who do love him.
We might imagine that what Jesus is doing here is not dissimilar to what we find that he did as he spoke with Peter following his resurrection. Do you love me?
We know that Peter loved Jesus. Jesus knew that Peter loved him. Nonetheless, he poses the question to make him ponder and to consider actually a very similar conclusion, that if you do, then feed my sheep, obey my commandments, do what I tell you.
[8:17] Demonstrate your love in this particular way. The big question, the big source of heartache for the disciples, these disciples who love Jesus, concerns how they are to give expression to their love for Jesus.

And that question would become even more urgent and pressing with the announced departure of Jesus. Once you've gone, Jesus, how will we show that we love you?
How will we be able to give expression to our love if you've gone? This is their concern, or certainly one of their concerns. Is the only way open to the disciples to give expression to their love to be troubled?
Their distress was evidence of love. It was one way of giving evidence of their love for Jesus. But Jesus says, that's not the best way. If you want to show that you love me, I have a much better way that you can do so.
Don't be troubled. Don't be in distress. This is the way. If you love me, you will obey what I command. It is a better way for them to express and demonstrate their love for Jesus, and it is the way of obedience.
[9:37] This is the purpose. This is what we've introduced as the point that we're considering here, the purpose behind Jesus' declaration. And this is the purpose.

This is the loving purpose behind Jesus' declaration, to give His beloved disciples a way, a manner, of demonstrating their love for Him, for Jesus.
What about you? Do you love Jesus? Seriously. Do you love Jesus? It's a big question. One telling evidence of loving Jesus is harboring a desire, almost a need, to give expression to that love.
We know that that's true in other loving relationships. If our professed love is genuine, it will seek out and find a way, perhaps a number of ways, of expressing and demonstrating love.

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Well, Jesus gave His disciples, and He gives us such a way. If you love Me, you will obey My commands. Let's move on to the second heading that we anticipated, and that is the authority implicit in Jesus' declaration.
[10:58] What are the words that immediately follow if you love Me? There in verse 15, if you love Me? Well, in our translation, the manner in which it's been presented is if you love Me, you will obey what I command.

In the order of words that we find in the Greek, and that's followed by other translations, one example being the English Standard Version, this verse is translated in this way.
If you love Me, My commands you will obey. And it does seem as if Jesus is placing a deliberate stress and emphasis on these two words.
If you love Me, My commands you will obey. And this expression, or these words, these two words, My commands, and especially this possessive pronoun, My commands, points to both the content of the commands in question, and the authority of the one commanding.
And these two things go very much together. Let's think of them separately, but on the understanding that they go very much together. My commands, pointing to the content, but also to the authority of the one who is commanding.
[12:12] What about the content? When Jesus says, My commands you will obey, well, what's He talking about? What commands is He referring to? Well, we can, of course, certainly include all the Lord's moral teaching while on earth.

When He gave His disciples commands, we can find them, and we can say, well, clearly this is included in what Jesus has in mind. We might focus very particularly, though not exclusively, on the Sermon on the Mount.
There we find Jesus giving commands to His disciples. And what can we say about the Sermon on the Mount if we just focus there for a moment? What is the Sermon on the Mount?
Well, among other things, it's an exposition and development of God's law given through Moses and synthesized in the Ten Commandments. And this is crucial. When Jesus speaks of My commands, He has in mind not only the body of teaching from His own lips that we have recorded in the Gospels, He is referring to all of God's law, that He daringly and spectacularly spectacularly takes ownership of and describes them as My commands.
It's interesting that in the same chapter, we have a statement by Jesus that feeds into what we're saying here in verse 10 of chapter 14. Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?
[13:36] The words that I say to you are not just My own. Of course, that includes His commands. They're not just My own. They belong to the Father also. Jesus is claiming joint ownership with the Father of His words.

And He is claiming implicitly joint ownership of the words of His Father as they're recorded for us. These are the commands. This is the content, if you wish, that we are to turn to, that we might know what the commands are, and that we might obey them as a demonstration of our love.
To use the rather dramatic language of one commentator, the one who wrote upon the tablets of stone is none other than the one who died on Calvary's cross. And this leads into the matter of the authority of the one commanding.
Not just identify the content, what's He referring to when He speaks of My commands, but what about the authority? This possessive pronoun, my, is nothing short of astonishing.
This is the language of one who was one with the Father and who had power to lay down laws and make statutes for His disciples. Jesus takes as a given His divine authority as a law giver.
[15:00] Moses never said, my commandments. He never used that language. But Jesus can say, my commandments. I am the law giver, and these are the commands that I give to you.

And in this, in this authority that is implicit in the words of Jesus, and when we think of it in the context of why it is that He's speaking as He is to bring tender comfort to His distressed disciples, in this we see a glorious marriage of love and authority, of tenderness and majesty.
Jesus is able at one and the same time to display His tender love for His grief-stricken disciples and maintain and assert His divine majesty and authority.
This is the King speaking, if you love me, my commands you will obey. And we need to grasp and respect this divine authority as we would identify and obey the commands that Jesus presents as the means whereby we can demonstrate our love for Him.

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It has become very popular and increasingly popular to insist on the tenderness of Jesus and the love of Jesus while conveniently ignoring His authority as our law giver.
[16:36] Let me just give you one topical example. Topical because it relates to a topical, and I have to say, tiresome matter of gay marriage and very particularly the case that was in the papers this week of the bakers in Belfast.

And the reason I use that as the example is that I happen to be reading the Telegraph on Thursday and one of the commentators wrote about it. And listen to what this particular commentator said. Alison Pearson, she wrote on the subject just on Thursday. Now as it happens, curiously, she was defending the MacArthur's, the owners of the bakery, arguing that it was very harsh, the judgment against them.
But the interesting thing is how she then feels obliged, no doubt afraid of being accused of being homophobic and all the rest of it. She feels obliged to then go on and say something else. And listen to what she says, and it's very interesting.
As it happens, and this is the quote, as it happens, I am a Christian who supports gay marriage. I simply can't believe that Jesus, who died for love, would have objected to anything which increases the store of human tenderness.
[17:52] This is what she says. Now the revealing and deeply flawed expression in that statement is, I simply can't believe that Jesus, dot, dot, dot.

She goes on to say something, but it could have been anything else. Alison, it would seem, is a convinced believer in the love of Jesus. He died for love, and I say, amen.
I share your convictions concerning the love of Jesus. But then she appropriates to herself the prerogative of deciding what Jesus does or does not object to.
And it follows what he approves or does not approve of. And you can't do that. To do so is to trample underfoot the authority of Jesus.
It is to dethrone Jesus, or at least foolishly attempt to dethrone Jesus and exalt self. What Alison Pearson is doing is saying, what really matters is what I think.
[18:56] And I'll decide not only what I think, but what Jesus should think. It's not only saying, it's just my opinion that matters, but I'll impose my opinion on Jesus.

You know, when I was thinking about this, it reminded me of Keith Harris and Orville. Now that may seem a rather bizarre thing, that it would remind me of Keith Harris and Orville. But Keith Harris is a ventriloquist.
He was in the news because he passed away just a few weeks ago. And those of you who are my age will remember Keith Harris. Some of you who are younger may as well. But one of his favorite characters was this very cuddly duck called Orville.
And Keith Harris was a ventriloquist. So it's a pretty easy question to answer, but who decided what Orville would say? Who determined what Orville would say?
This cuddly little duck, who decided? Was it Orville? Well, no, obviously not. It was Keith Harris who decided what his cuddly little duck would say. He was a ventriloquist. That's what he did.
[19:59] But you know, that's not so different to what people like this journalist, Alison Pearson, and there are so many others, are doing with Jesus. Jesus is being reduced to a ventriloquist doll who will accommodatingly say whatever we want him to say.

I can't believe that Jesus would say that. I can't believe that Jesus would believe that. Well, it doesn't really matter what you think. What does he say?
If you love me, my commands you will obey. Listen to Jesus. My commands you will obey.
All of them, whether you like them or not, whether they fit in with the spirit of the age or not, with the prevailing zeitgeist, to use a word that our moderator loves.
Apparently it means the spirit of the age or the dominant school of thought. It doesn't matter if what Jesus says doesn't fit in with what the majority are saying or with what the clever and popular, beautiful people are saying.
[21:10] It's a matter irrelevant and indifferent. Jesus says to us, his followers, if you love me, my commands you will obey. But then we move on in the third place.

The statement of Jesus has implicit his authority to command. But then thirdly, the obedience commended as a love gift to Jesus.
What are we to do with Jesus' commands? Well, we are to obey them. Now, I'm describing that obedience as a love gift to Jesus.

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If Jesus' statement here, verse 15, if it was read in isolation by an objective observer, if there is such a thing as an objective observer, but let's imagine there could be an objective observer who would read these words in isolation without any prior opinions on Jesus.
I think such an observer would be, would have good reason to conclude that Jesus was a self-obsessed megalomaniac.
[22:23] Think about it. If you love me, obey me. That's the way you'll show that you love me by obeying me. It doesn't sound like the kind of thing that love would require.

Obedience. And as I say, if the words are looked at in isolation, that is the impression that they could give. Who is this guy who demands unquestioning obedience as evidence of genuine and acceptable love?
But you see, the principal concern of Jesus is not his self-esteem at being able to command such subservient obedience, but his loving concern that his disciples be afforded a means of expressing their love.
That is his concern. He wants lovingly to give his disciples the means whereby the love that they do bear towards him can be expressed, can be shown.
It is for their good that he grants them this indication. It is, of course, also true in parallel that Jesus knows that true happiness and satisfaction for his disciples will be found in obedience to his commands.
[23:36] Of course, that reality goes right back to the law being given in the Old Testament. Obey these things, do these things, that it may go well with you. It is for their good, not some ego trip as it might rather crudely be considered if it were to be seen or the words were to be seen in isolation.

Our gift of love to Jesus is obedience. The one we love because he first loved us and gave himself in love fought us.
Our love gift in return is obedience. And when we realize that that is what is going on, that informs and molds the nature of our obedience.
Loving obedience will be cheerful obedience. It will be rigorous obedience. It will be persevering obedience. The more we love, the more cheerful, the more rigorous, the more persevering.
It's also striking how Jesus presents disobedience not as an onerous demand but as an almost natural or necessary consequence. Jesus doesn't say, if you claim to love me, then you must obey me to prove your love.
[24:56] He doesn't say that. He says, if you love me, my commands, you will obey. That is what will happen. That will be the evidence of your love. Well, what about you?

Do you love Jesus? And how do you manifest or express your love? That takes us to the final thing that I want us to think about this morning and that is the help promised by Jesus to those who love Jesus.
It is a wonderful thing that we have the verse that follows, verse 16. In its absence, we could be left with a real sense of frustration as believers.
Why so? It's not easy to obey Jesus' commands. Talk about stating the glaringly obvious. You know that, don't you?
It's not easy to obey Jesus' commands. So we have a problem. I love Jesus. I want to demonstrate that I love Jesus. The way in which I'll demonstrate that I love Jesus is by obeying His commands and then we hit the wall because we find it so difficult to obey His commands often.
[26:07] In grace, there may be times when we don't find it difficult to obey some of His commands. But I think we'd all honestly acknowledge that there are times when we find it very difficult to obey His commands.

love helps enormously but it's still difficult. You see, the verse that follows, verse 16, assures us that Jesus does not only lovingly afford us with a means of expressing our love, He also promises to help us show our love as we obey His commands.
Well, how so? Well, listen to what we find. Look at what we have there. And listen carefully because this is amazing. Jesus indicates to His disciples and to us, He indicates that each person of the Trinity is involved in helping us show our love to Jesus by obeying Him.
The combined resources of the Godhead are directed to helping you love Jesus. Look at verse 16. Notice how it begins.
Jesus has just said, if you love me, you will obey what I command. And then He says, and. And that and is connecting what Jesus just said to what He is about to say. This verse 16 is Jesus explaining

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to us and assuring us that in this matter of obeying Him, He wants to help us and He does help us.
[27:44] This verse is about what Jesus will do to help us obey Him. but not just what Jesus will do. You see, as we see in the verse, the Son, Jesus, prays to the Father asking for help on your behalf.

That would be amazing enough. But of course, the Father hears and answers the petition of His Son on your behalf. And what does He do? Well, the Father, in turn, sends the Holy Spirit, another counselor, to be with you forever to help you obey Jesus' commands.
That is not all that He does. He does so many things for us, but this is one of the things that He does for us. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in divine concert with the wonderful goal of helping you, a struggling sinner, show your love to Jesus, to the triune God by your obedience.
We need to dig a little deeper and consider the manner in which the Spirit of Truth, as He's described or named in this passage, or counselor, asked for by the Son and sent by the Father, can help us to show our love by obeying Jesus.
How does He do that? He's sent to do that, but how does He help us? The Greek word, translated counselor on this occasion, is a word parakletos, and it is a word that is recognized to have a wide semantic range, which is just a fancy way of saying that it can be translated with several different English words.
[29:23] One of the words that can be used to translate this Greek word is helper, or even friend, but let's focus on helper. The Spirit helps us to love Jesus, and the Spirit helps us to obey Jesus.

How so? He helps us to love Jesus by ever pointing us to Jesus and helping us understand in and through the Scriptures all that Jesus has done for us.
In the same chapter, when Jesus picks up on the theme again, He never left the theme, but when explicitly in verse 26, He expresses Himself as follows, but the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
Do you remember in our text, Jesus is saying, if you love Me, My commands you will obey. Well, how do we know His commands? Well, the Holy Spirit will help us. He'll remind us what Jesus' commands are.
He'll help us understand the implications of His commands. He helps us at that level of comprehension, if you wish, of what it is that is being asked or demanded of us.
[30:42] So, the Holy Spirit helps us. He stokes our love for Jesus by pointing us to Jesus. He reminds us of what Jesus has commanded.

And He gives us strength to obey. But you know, there's more. Jesus says that the Father will send another counselor.
There in verse 16, I will ask the Father and He will give you another counselor. Does Jesus mean instead of or in addition to?
Does the Father send the Spirit to replace the Son? That might appear to be the situation, especially in the light of Jesus' imminent departure. And in one sense, that is what happened. Jesus was leaving the disciples. He was departing to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, having fulfilled His redemptive work. And in this sense, the Father sends the Spirit to take the place of Jesus.
[31:43] In one level or at one sense, that is a legitimate reading of what is going on. But in another sense, in a complementary sense, the Spirit should be seen as being given by the Father in addition to Jesus.

We now have two paracletes or helpers, one on earth and one in heaven. And just think about that for a moment in relation to the matter to hand, showing our love by obeying Jesus.
our helper on earth, the Holy Spirit, dwelling within us, helps us to obey, as we've just looked at very fleetingly.
But what happens when even though we count with the Spirit's help, we fail and we disobey? What happens then? Well, that scenario is covered too.
Our helper or advocate, to use another word that can be used to translate this word, it's often to do with the context that would determine what the right word is.
[32:48] But that's one way in which this word panically is translated, very particularly in 1 John 2 and verse 1. So when we fail to obey, even though we have the help of the Spirit with us that we might obey, when we fail, well, there too we can rest in the assurance that we have another helper,

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an advocate in heaven at the right hand of the Father interceding for us and securing our forgiveness.

Praise be to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's great to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
It is a wonderful thing to be a Christian deeply loved by God, lovingly afforded the means and opportunity to give expression to our grateful love for God, and wonder of wonders graciously helped by God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to show our love by our obedience to His commands.
If we love Jesus, in what ways should we behave? If you love me, my commands you will obey.
Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come and we acknowledge your goodness and your greatness.
We come and we celebrate your Son.
[34:23] Son, we thank you for His tender love that is demonstrated in this deep concern that He has for His distressed disciples and how we stand in need of that tenderness in our lives.

But we thank you that that tenderness is indeed married with His great authority, the eternal Son of God, the one with all authority to enact commands for us.
And so we pray that you would help us to know and relate to your Son, Jesus, with that understanding, with that greater and growing understanding of who He is.
We do thank you that the love that we profess in all its limitations, in all its frailty, in all its inadequacy, but the love that we profess, a love that we bear because you first loved us and we respond to that love.
We thank you that we are given this avenue, this means of demonstrating that love as we obey your commands.
[35:40] Help us then to obey and we thank you for the great help that you have offered to us and that is available to us. And all these things we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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